Olancha Remembered

By Wilma R. Olson

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WILMA R. OLSON

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For Those
Who Remember
and
Those Who
Care

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INTRODUCTION

The town of Olancha, located in southern Inyo County, California, had its beginning, like so many other communities, in the era of mining exploration in the Coso, Inyo and White Mountains. Recognized as the site of the first industry in the area, other than a trading post at Little Pine (Independence), Olancha has been largely ignored in published accounts of the area, receiving only passing references in local histories. Other than two historical markers commemorating an early stage depot and the site of Farley's mill, the town has received little recognition.

Many towns which sprang up during the mining boom flourished for a few years, and, as the available ores were depleted, were deserted and became ghost towns. The little settlement of Olancha, however, has continued for well over a hundred years with at least one business or industry operating. This longevity in itself has made Olancha unique.

As the population is increasingly formed of people from other geographic areas, the origin of the community can become indistinct if not documented. This was illustrated some years ago when an item was published in the local newspaper regarding an abandoned building complex. It used to be a motel, the item stated,

whose name "nobody remembered and nobody cared". Some people did remember, and did care about preserving the past of this little town.

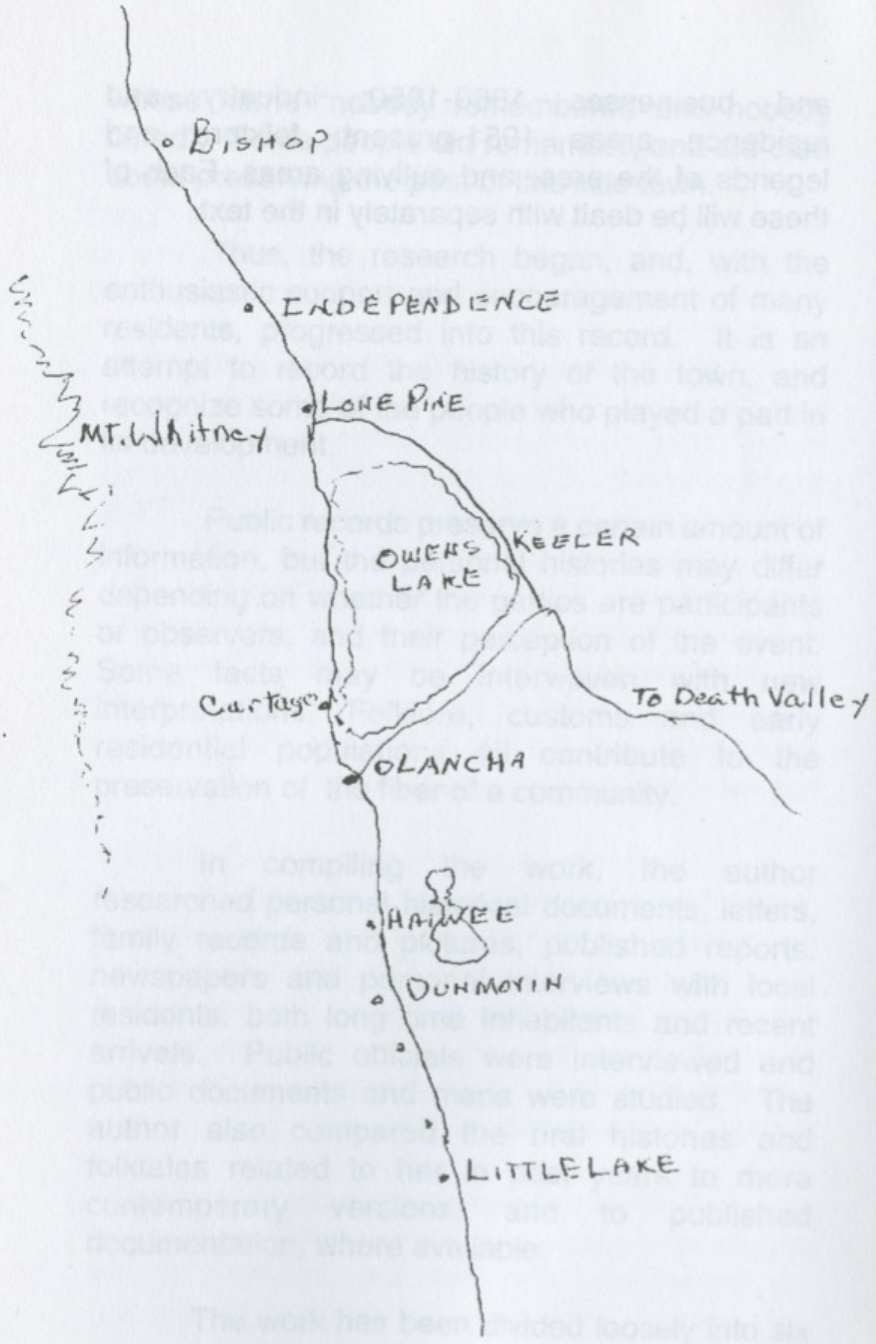
Thus, the research began, and, with the enthusiastic support and encouragement of many residents, progressed into this record. It is an attempt to record the history of the town, and recognize some of the people who played a part in its development.

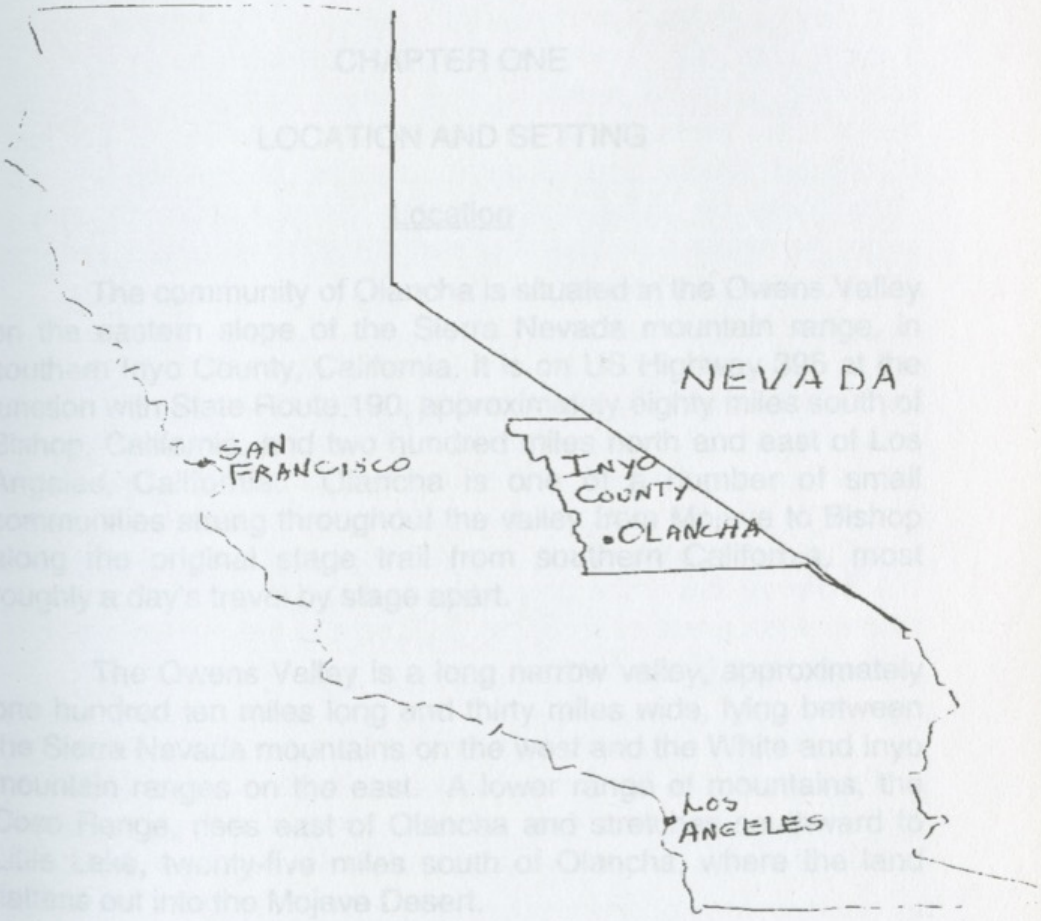
Public records preserve a certain amount of information, but the personal histories may differ depending on whether the parties are participants or observers, and their perception of the event. Some facts may be interwoven with new interpretations. Folklore, customs and early residential populations all contribute to the preservation of the fiber of a community.

In compiling the work, the author researched personal historical documents, letters, family records and pictures, published reports, newspapers and personal interviews with local residents, both long time inhabitants and recent arrivals. Public officials were interviewed and public documents and maps were studied. The author also compared the oral histories and folktales related to her in past years to more contemporary versions, and to published documentation, where available.

The work has been divided loosely into six categories: community location and setting; archeology and historic contact; early residents

and businesses 1860-1950; industry and residence areas 1951-present; folklore and legends of the area; and outlying areas. Each of these will be dealt with separately in the text.


BISHOP
INDEPENDENCE
LONE PINE
MT. Whitney
OWENS LAKE
KEELER
Cartago
To Death Valley
OLANCHA
HAIWEE
DUNMOYIN
LITTLE LAKE



Map 1 & 2 Locattion of Olancha,
Inyo County, California

CHAPTER ONE

LOCATION AND SETTING

Location

The community of Olancha is situated in the Owens Valley on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, in southern Inyo County, California. It is on US Highway 395 at the junction with State Route 190, approximately eighty miles south of Bishop, California, and two hundred miles north and east of Los Angeles, California. Olancha is one of a number of small communities strung throughout the valley from Mojave to Bishop along the original stage trail from southern California, most roughly a day's travel by stage apart.

The Owens Valley is a long narrow valley, approximately one hundred ten miles long and thirty miles wide, lying between the Sierra Nevada mountains on the west and the White and Inyo mountain ranges on the east. A lower range of mountains, the Coso Range, rises east of Olancha and stretches southward to Little Lake, twenty-five miles south of Olancha, where the land flattens out into the Mojave Desert.

Owens Lake, a large inland lake approximately twenty by fifteen miles, lies adjacent to the town of Olancha on the northeast. The lake is highly saline, supporting no aquatic life and has no outlet. The Owens River empties into it at the northern end, near the town of Lone Pine.

At the end of the Pleistocene Period, about 10,000 years ago, the area was characterized by lakes formed by runoff from the melting glaciers. Owens Lake was probably an inland sea, with water overflowing into the valleys south of Olancha, in descending lakes to the southern Mojave Desert area. As the waters receded, Owens Lake became landlocked, and the saline content increased as the outlets disappeared, probably about

4,500 years ago. Sand dunes cover the area east of Olancha and south of Owens Lake. In the last few decades, a change in the prevailing winds has moved the sand dunes south and east, and they have diminished in height. Although the sand still covers a large area, the dunes are not as impressive as in the past, according to some residents and former residents. The sand dunes were probably a remnant of the coastline of the lake. Fossilized shells and skeletal remains of aquatic life can occasionally be found in the dunes. Some fossilized bones of large mammals have been unearthed at times when the road along the lake was realigned,

US Highway 395 follows along the western edge of the lake, State Route 190 goes easterly along the southern side, and State Route 136 from Lone Pine follows the lake easterly and southerly along the north and east sides of the lake. State Routes 136 and 190 are the major western routes into Death Valley National Monument, about one hundred miles east of Olancha. US Highway 395 is the only highway through the valley from the metropolitan areas of southern California to the recreational area of the eastern Sierra Nevada.

West of Olancha, rolling hills rise to the sharp escarpment of the east side of the Sierra Nevada, with peaks over 12,000 feet elevation. Olancha Peak, directly west of Olancha, has an elevation of 12,183 feet. The elevation at Olancha is 3,648 feet.

Setting

The area around Olancha, about twenty-five miles north of the northern boundary of the Mojave desert, is considered high desert. The soil is fine gravel and sandy loam supporting native grasses and shrubs of sagebrush, creosote, joshua trees and cacti. With irrigation, the soil supports agricultural crops of alfalfa, garden vegetables, flowers and fruit trees.

Feral mammals include rodents, rabbits, coyotes, bobcats and burros. During spring and summer, gardens and fields are often entered at night by burros coming from the dry desert area of the Coso Range, attracted by the green vegetation. Coyotes and bobcats are attracted to the chicken populations, and rabbits

are a nuisance to the garden owners. Aside from the marauding burros, larger feral mammals do not frequent the townsite. One exception occurred in the early 1950s, when a young black bear wandered into a corral at the Brown ranch. The bear was captured, and kept chained for a time, causing a mild flurry of visitation by both residents and tourists. The bear succeeded in breaking loose after a few months and was not seen again.

Wild geese and ducks frequently land on the southern end of Owens Lake during the fall migration, but do not winter there. Quail are plentiful in the area, and several residents have, over the years, tamed the coveys somewhat by feeding them. The quail thus tamed have learned to come when called, and some even perch on the feeder's head or shoulders. When such a covey is tamed, the neighbors are protective and watchful that hunters do not enter the area. One covey was located at the Butler motel at the north end of Olancha during the 1940s. Another covey frequented a residence south of Olancha in the vicinity of Sage Flats Road. George Brown, owner of the Brown ranch, fed a covey for a number of years.

Cottonwood, elm and tamarisk trees predominate the townsite, with willows growing in the lakeside meadows and black oak occurring in the foothills west of town. There are rows of cottonwoods growing around the two major ranches and extending up Olancha Creek to the west. These were originally planted by the owners of the William Walker (Brown) ranch from trimmings of logs cut for building materials, and created an effective windbreak around the ranch. They have since multiplied so that the main part of town now harbors a multitude of cottonwoods. There is a row of the trees west of the present highway, following the outline of the original road through the townsite. In the fall, when the leaves turn golden, the area is a favorite stopping place for artists and photographers, using the brilliant colors as the foreground for striking pictures of the mountains to the west.

Olancha Creek flows from the canyon west of the town and empties into Owens Lake. An early settler re-channeled a creek at the foothills to run north and empty into Olancha Creek at the head of Olancha Canyon, increasing the flow in Olancha

Creek. The flow becomes extremely low in summer months. A portion of the creek runs underground in the low foothills west of town, channeling under huge slabs of granite deposited during the land upheavals which formed the Sierra mountains.

Rainfall is light, only a few inches per year. Temperatures range from below freezing in winter to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer months. Occasionally, snow falls in the winter months, usually melting within a day, although the area has experienced snowfalls of several feet over the years. The winter season is usually marked by high northerly winds.

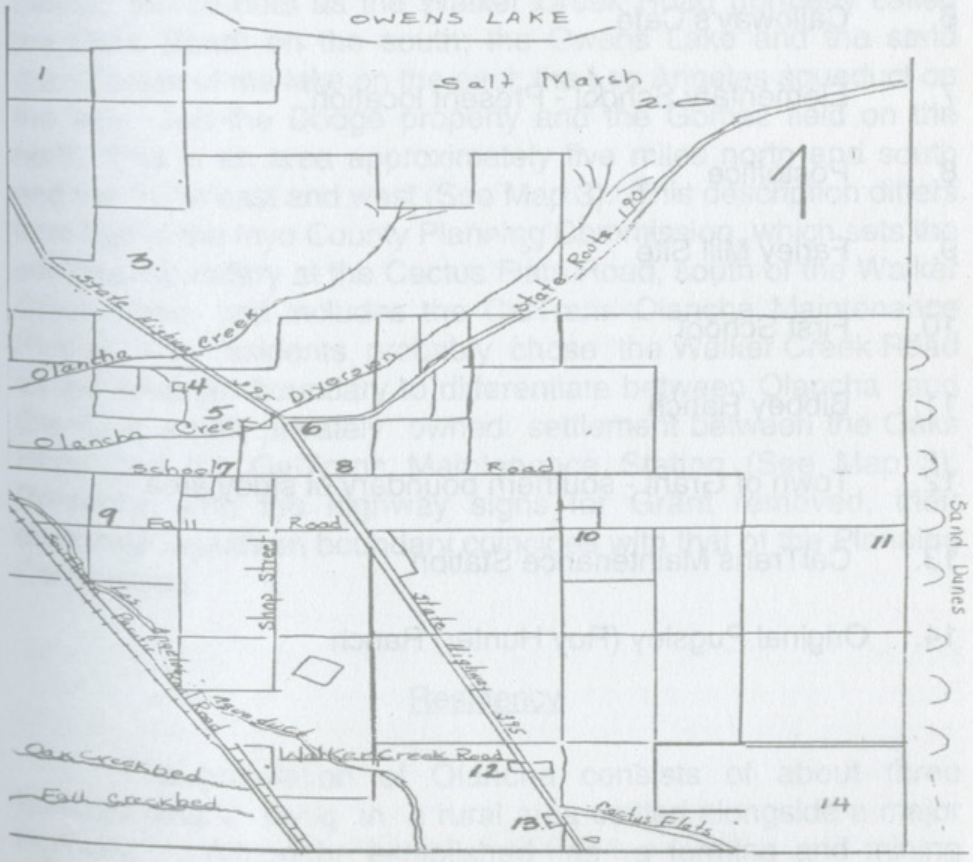
Soda ash from the saline lake intrudes the soil and buildings during the winter windy season. Traffic on the highway is sometimes delayed because of the blowing ash and decreased visibility. High winds occasionally overturn trailers, trucks and other vehicles, as well as some buildings which are not sturdily constructed.

Earthquakes over the years may have changed the level of the lake also. Consultants maintained that the earthquake of 1872 changed the boundary of the lake, exposing land area to the south and west ends. This coincides with old maps of the area, which show springs on the lake edge. These springs are now located west of the lake edge. The San Andreas earthquake fault runs about one mile west of the town, and the area is subject to tremors when the fault is active, although no extensive damage has been reported in the area in recent times. One homeowner in Sage Flats built his house at the edge of what he thought was a dry creek bed, only later to realize that he had chosen to build on the edge of the San Andreas fault crevice. As testament to the ability of this home builder, no damage has occurred to the house from earthquakes.

Water for domestic use and irrigation is from wells drilled by property owners. Rights to the water of Olancha Creek, which bisects the town, were held by two ranchers whose headquarters were located within the town boundaries until the mid-1980s, when the City of Los Angeles purchased three ranches and acquired water rights to Olancha Creek. Electricity is obtained from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Bottled

gas is used for heating and cooking. Septic tanks provide sewage disposal. Trash and garbage are transported to the waste disposal site in Lone Pine.

During the last few decades, the water table has dropped in the valley, decreasing the amount of flow into the lake, and creating a larger surface area of soda ash. The ash has become an air pollutant in recent years. The Owens Dry Lake Task Force was established jointly by the State Lands Commission, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and China Lake Naval Weapons Center to research methods of dust control. Among the experimental studies are drift fences, aquatic plants and drought resistant shrubs and trees. The efforts have not resulted in a major decrease in the blowing soda ash, according to residents.



Map 3: Community Landmarks

LEGEND - MAP 3

1. Dodge Property - northern boundary of study area
2. Dirty Socks
3. Original A. Walker (Lacey) Ranch
4. Ranch House Cafe - Barber's
5. Original W. Walker (Brown) Ranch
6. Calloway's Cafe
7. Elementary School - Present location
8. Postoffice
9. Farley Mill Site
10. First School
11. Bibbey Ranch
12. Town of Grant - southern boundary of study area
13. CalTrans Maintenance Station
14. Original Pugsley (Roy Hunter) Ranch

As with most small unincorporated communities, there are no formal boundary lines for the town, but the residents of the area have informally outlined the limits of the area. In this case, the claim to residency of the area is likely to be based on the post office address of the resident. This is true of Olancha and its environs. For instance, people who live ten miles away are apt to say they live in Sage Flats, but since their mailing address is a post office box in Olancha, they consider themselves part of that community. Since Sage Flats is not a central part of the town itself, but a populated valley southwest of the town, it is not included as a major part of this work. It has in recent decades become known as a separate community from Olancha, although no businesses exist there.

For the purpose of this research, the residents earlier defined the borders as the Walker Creek Road (formerly called the Oaks Road) on the south; the Owens Lake and the sand dunes south of the lake on the east; the Los Angeles aqueduct on the west; and the Dodge property and the Gomez field on the north. This is an area approximately five miles north and south and five miles east and west (See Map 3). This description differs from that of the Inyo County Planning Commission, which sets the southern boundary at the Cactus Flats Road, south of the Walker Creek Road, and includes the CalTrans Olancha Maintenance Station. The residents probably chose the Walker Creek Road as the southern boundary to differentiate between Olancha and Grant, a small, privately owned settlement between the Oaks Road and the CalTrans Maintenance Station (See Map 3). Presently, with the highway signs for Grant removed, their designated southern boundary coincides with that of the Planning Commission.

Residency

The population of Olancha consists of about three hundred people living in a rural area settled alongside a major highway. Although established as a farming and mining community, it has developed a residential area in addition to the ranches. The residential lots lie predominantly on the west side of the highway, with ranches and farms on the east side. The two

major ranches which dominate the town have pastureland on both sides of the highway between the business districts. Olancha supports three service stations, two restaurants, and a local grocery store. Two motels are currently operated, one at the Grant location south of the main business section, and one just outside the town boundaries. A garage which has been closed is again in the process of reopening under new ownership. A water bottling plant was erected on land just north of the town boundaries, and commenced producing bottled water from springs on the property in the late 1980s.

Residents work in the local businesses, the mines when they are producing, and on the ranches. Others commute to employment in other communities in the valley, as they have done regularly over the years. However, the residents do not consider themselves a fringe, or suburban community, but rather a small, rural town. The farming properties are referred to as ranches, even though acreage is comparatively small and most support little livestock.

Olancha as a community has experienced the changes and variables associated with the formation of a cohesive society, including movement of individuals to and from the community, birth, death, marriage and divorce. All these variables are defined by the diversity of the individuals who have settled there.

First Euro-American settlers were miners, attracting attendant tradesmen as the mill was developed and the mines produced ore. These were followed by farmers attracted by reports of miners and travelers through the area of fine meadows and water. Freight stations were established as the need for transportation of ore and supplies increased. Two large cattle ranches and three goat ranches were operated in the community. Farms were homesteaded, then abandoned when the lack of water for irrigation proved detrimental to crop farming, and marketing the crops was proven financially unprofitable.

The large agricultural complex in the central and northern valley dominated the farm market, supplying the larger populations in the established towns and shipping to the mines and distant markets. Providing food supplies for the miners and

livestock proved costly to the small farm operators, considering the distance the goods had to be transported. The saline lake on the east could not be used either for irrigation or drinking water, and the salinity in the soil south of the lake prevented agricultural interests.

As automobile transportation increased, the community developed a tourist oriented business section, with the two cattle ranches dominating the settlement. Ranch workers, restaurant employees, mechanics and retirees made up the bulk of the immigrants in the last six decades. The predominant choice of location was, and remains, because it offered a quiet, rural life, cleaner air, good neighbors and the opportunity to participate in a close network of relationships in an area which provided economic stability.

Political leadership in the community is stratified in much the same way as found in other communities, with the large property owner most prominent, followed by business and professional leaders, retired residents with capital, white-collar workers, rural and working class commuters, and residents employed locally. Elective political office, such as supervisor or school board member, enhances stature. Since the formation of a Community Services district in the mid-sixties, some political leadership has been established through service on this governing board. Additionally, in Olancha, acquiring property or becoming a business proprietor influences the individual's status. Newcomers are still referred to as "flatlanders", "foreigners" or outsiders and hold little influence initially.

Work-exchange systems exist in the form of communal cattle drives from the valley to the mountains in early summer, and the return drive in the fall. In recent years this workforce has included not only the local ranchers and ranch hands, but professional people from other towns and southern California urban centers. These non-ranchers consider these outings as vacations from their usual work, and though considered outsiders, they are accepted by the ranchers and cowboys. Although perhaps occupying a higher status in their own locale, in this setting, the role of the professional businessman is subordinate to that of the cowboy.

Occasionally, a retiree or resident not normally in the work force will take a position to "help out" a business operator who is temporarily in need of a worker. These positions may last a few days or a few years. They vary from store clerk to waitress or cook to service station attendant. Diversity in the population provides a wide range of skills in many fields.

The functional interdependence of Olancha residents, based on group identification and loyalty, can be described as typical of small communities. Their sense of unity is expressed by their support of the school through a strong parent-teacher organization; the volunteer fire department's annual fund raising fair; the sharing of transportation; and the emotional support provided to those experiencing personal crises. The communal sharing of seasonal work with the cattle on summer and fall drives involves not only the local ranchers, but in addition, ranchers from other areas to the north.

Fig. 1. Sand dunes, circa mid-1940s. A. Morgan photo collection

Sand dunes presently. W. Olson photo

Row of old cottonwoods bordering west side of highway. W. Olson photo

Old monarch cottonwood in Brown field east of highway.
W. Olson photo

CHAPTER TWO

ARCHEOLOGY AND EARLY HISTORIC CONTACT

Archeology and Native American Occupation

There has been no formal archeological investigation of the study area to date. Therefore, there is no accurate dating of the earliest occupation. Other nearby areas which have been surveyed have been dated to 2000-3000 years. The area is popular with pot hunters, and a large number of arrow points, mortars and pestles have been removed from the area. This implies Native American occupations of the area, at least seasonally, and corresponds to information received from Native American consultants. Some accounts mention a major village at Olancha, however, this has not been substantiated by formal archeological investigation. M. F. Farley, in correspondence, mentions the fine meadows and fields of clover maintained by the Indians. He noted that they used nets in the lake, but had no canoes. Journals, letters and diaries of early trappers and travelers indicate Native American occupation at the townsite but do not clarify whether it was a permanent settlement. Nearby large permanent grinding stones and cave shelters indicate habitation for extended periods. Both Native Americans and descendants of early settlers stated that there were seasonal camps in the area, but no permanent site. These could possibly be the ones referred to by persons who observed them prior to the naming of the townsite in 1860.

The townsite is on the southern boundary of the Owens Valley Paiute territory and the northern boundary of the Shoshoni people. Both tribes used the area, which was also a stopping place for Paiutes traveling to Coso Hot Springs, a spiritual healing area about twenty miles south of Olancha.

The hot springs are regarded as sacred ground by Native Americans, and were historically visited for purposes of purification and healing by both Shoshoni and Paiute. Situated in Shoshoni territory, the springs were shared by all tribes who visited. The protocol demanded proper preparation and ritual of anyone entering the sacred area if they were to be healed. Olancha was a stopping place for the Paiutes traveling from the north on their way to the springs.

A Native American consultant related how he was so crippled by arthritis by age eighteen that he could not walk, and made the journey to the springs in a wagon. He was in so much pain that they had to stop in Olancha for a few days so that he would be able to continue. On arrival at the springs, he performed the required rituals and camped there for two weeks, at which time he was again able to walk without pain, and remained free of the crippling disease. This consultant also described large metates and grinding rocks left there for all to use, but said someone had stolen them. He told of people who came but did not observe the customs, and gained no relief. He stated that the reason the white people did not benefit from the springs was because they did not prepare properly.

Trails through the mountains to the west indicate that a trading route existed from the area to the western Sierra. Consultants stated that there is an important burial site nearby, but outside the boundaries of the study. The field notes of A. W. Von Schmidt, who surveyed the area in 1856, make no mention of Native American occupation. His maps do not show any camps, as do his other maps of nearby areas.

Artifacts dating to the period in the 1860s and 1870s when the army units were stationed in the valley have been recovered in the mountain meadows on the western side of the mountain peaks. This would indicate that travel and interaction occurred during and after that time. Identity of the people who obtained the army material is unknown, whether Paiute and Shoshoni, or Yokuts.

In recent years, formal archeological investigations have identified a large number of artifacts and pictographs near the

Olancha area, but have not yet established their origin. Most of these are on private property and access is by permission only. It is possible that these pictographs, which are unlike other local rock art, were made by people who inhabited the western slope of the Sierra, and traveled to the area on trading and hunting expeditions. Some of the paintings are located near Portuguese Point west of Olancha. They depict small mammals and birds, and possible tribal identification markings.

That there was travel over the mountains is established by the number of trails, and substantiated by the writings of Farley, who described the "Indian trails which are all-year trails and easily followed". Farley also mentioned rock drawings colored with cinnabar, of warriors and animals. He wrote that they were evidently the work of a former race, "for intelligence necessary to produce them does not exist among the squalid creatures now inhabiting the region".

Native American habitation of the area, at least seasonally, is established by the vast number of arrow points and stone tools which have been found in the area, and from accounts by early travelers of coming upon camps by the lake. By noting the dates in the journals, one can assume that the camps were probably seasonal. For instance, Joseph Walker traveled through in early summer, when the fly larvae, used by the Native Americans as a food supply, were plentiful on the lake, and encountered Native American camps, as discussed below. A. W. Von Schmidt did his survey in August when the people quite likely moved to the foothills for cooler climate and pinon nut gathering. Black oaks grow in the foothills to the west, and the acorns were a prized food source.

That there was a sizable occupation there, probably during the fall food gathering, is indicated by the large number of stationary mortars and pestles along the creek area west of town. A number of baskets were removed from shelters in the area, along with mortars and grinding stones. The fresh water springs, meadows and trees probably contributed to seasonal occupation. The larvae of a fly which populated the saline lake in early summer was gathered and dried by Native Americans, who used the food as a diet staple.

Earliest settlers in the area made no mention of a native population, which further attests to the theory of the Olancha townsite being a temporary or seasonal camp. A descendant of an early settler stated that at the time land was being homesteaded, there were only two Shoshoni families living in the townsite. Others have mentioned a small village in the foothills south and west of the townsite, described by their ancestor

First European Contact

Journals, letters, maps and diaries of early trappers and explorers have been preserved in public archives and private collections and accurately date the beginning of travel through the area. Olancha was first settled by Euro-Americans in 1861, but these earlier archival materials chronicle the travels through the area. The area was at that time a part Tulare County.

Earliest recorded Euro-American contact in the area of Olancha is that of Joseph Walker, a trapper who worked for the Hudson Bay Company and came from the San Joaquin Valley over what is now called Walker Pass and up the Owens Valley looking for beaver in the spring of 1834. When he came to the south end of the lake, at what would become the site of Olancha, he surprised a party of Indians who abandoned their lodges and fled. Walker and his party plundered the camp, and took with them several skin pouches of material they thought were some kind of nutmeat. They camped there that night and ate the tasty food they had confiscated. Next day, after interviewing one of the men of the Indian party, they discovered that the tasty meal was the dried larvae of flies, gathered from the saline lake. A member of the party remarked in his journal that they immediately returned the uneaten food to the Indians.

Captain Joseph Reddington is thought to have also camped here in 1834 on an expedition to find a new route from Salt Lake City to southern California. The description of the meadows and springs and the saline lake indicate that this was his campsite.

Walker again went through the valley and camped at Olancha in 1843 when he guided the Chiles party from Missouri to southern California. In 1845, he acted as guide to a mapping party under the direction of Brevet Captain John C. Fremont. In 1856, A. W. Von Schmidt made the first survey of the area. He was contracted by Colonel Jack Hays of the Texas Surveyor of Public Lands Company to survey the public lands east of the Sierra and south of Mono to a point south of Owens Lake. In his notes, Von Schmidt mentions the fine grass and meadows, the springs and the soil, which he describes as sandy gravel. His maps show springs and a stream at the southern end of the lake. He makes no mention of habitation of the area. Contemporary consultants confirmed that there was a stream and pond at the south end of the lake, near the Clay Mine Road, off Highway 190.

In 1859, Colonel Beall from Fort Tejon was the leader of a military force up the Owens Valley in search of cattle thieves among the Indians. He camped at Olancha, and estimated there were eight hundred to a thousand acres of meadowland at the foot of the saline lake, along with fresh springs. He mentioned seeing some Indians, whom he described as being in good health and of good character. He described the saline lake and the larvae of flies which were collected by the Indian women.

There are accounts of others making the journey from the San Joaquin Valley over Walker's Pass and northward through Owens Valley to the settlements in the northern part of the valley. These other pioneers and cattlemen stopped only briefly, and there is no indication that any of them settled here. If they did, there are no available records of their observations, other than mention of the fine springs and meadows at the south end of the lake.

Since the area was a part of Mexico prior to the Mexican-American War, it is likely that there were some Mexican or Chilean miners in the area earlier, but there is no documentation of such occupancy. A large population of Mexicans resided at Lone Pine, some twenty miles north. Shortly after the mining region south and east of Olancha was opened to exploration and exploitation, there appears references to Mexican miners, but the date of their occupation is unclear. Remnants of arrestas, a

device used by Mexican miners to separate ores, and a tram can be found in the area near Sage Flats. It appears from the records, however, that large scale mining exploitation was largely undertaken by the Euro- Americans.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY SETTLEMENT

Townsite

The townsite of Olancha was established by a miner, Minnard Farley, who came to the area with Darwin French's party in 1860 in an effort to find the Lost Gunsight Mine. This legendary mountain of silver was said to lie east of Owens Lake and west of Death Valley in the Funeral Mountains. The name is attributed to the fact that one of the Bennett party of immigrants stranded in Death Valley in the winter of 1849 had knocked his gunsight off in an effort to scale a ridge to seek help. He took some mineral from the ledge he was on and fashioned a crude sight for his gun from it. Later, when he reached civilization, he took his gun to a gunsmith to have the sight properly replaced, and it was then that he discovered that his home made sight was almost pure silver. Many people, among them Darwin French, attempted in vain to find the ledge of silver.

Minnard Farley was a member of that party, and although they did not discover the fabled ledge, they did discover promising ore in the Cosos. On his map of 1861, Farley shows a pass named for him, now known as Boundary Canyon between the Funeral and Grapevine mountain ranges. From this general area he took ore samples with him when the party returned to Visalia.

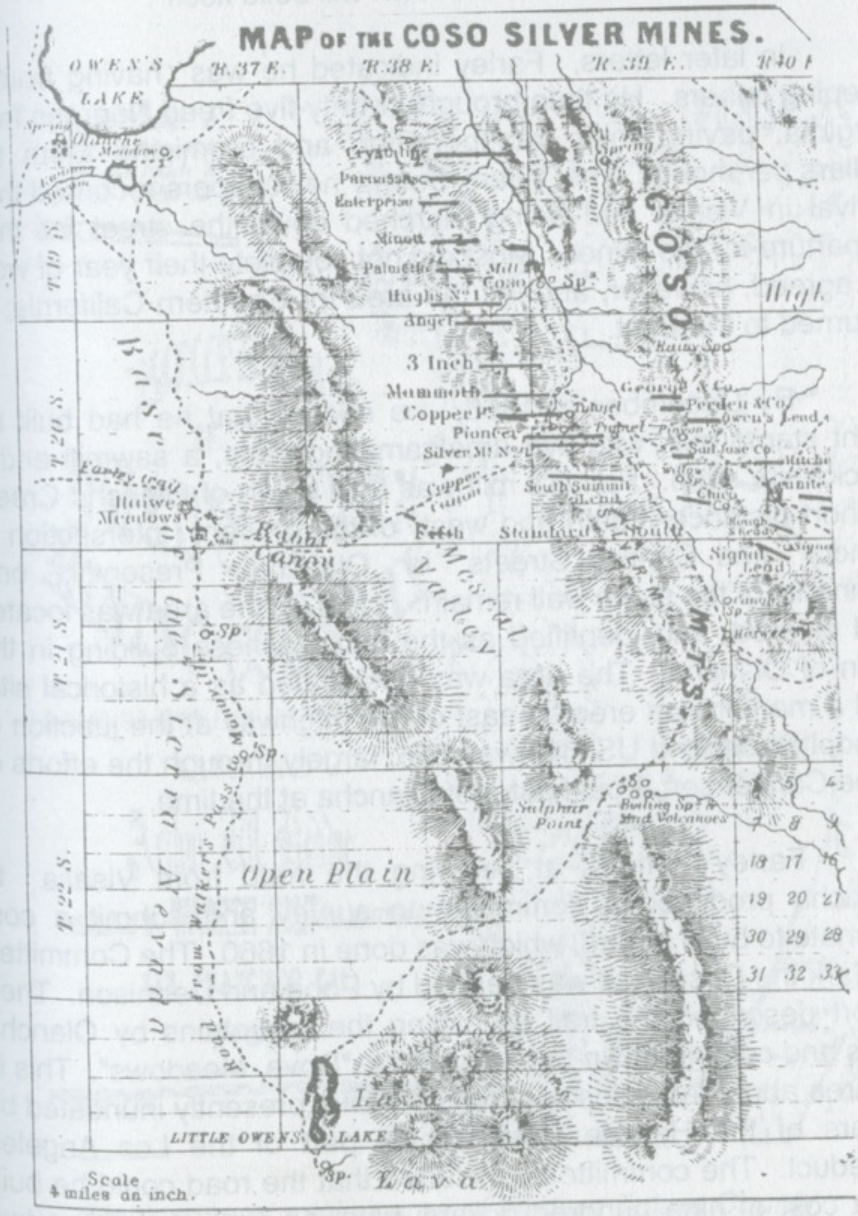
Upon having the ore assayed in Visalia, Farley returned and staked about eighty claims in the Coso Range in an area he called "Silver Mountain". In Visalia, the county seat of Tulare County, of which the area was then a part, he secured financial aid and partners, and organized the Coso Silver Mining

Company. In one of his many letters to Visalia newspapers, he stated he named the mining district for the Indians living there. He returned to the area to develop his claims, and decided to build his own mill near the mines. He chose the site which he referred to as "Olanche", as it was near a stream, building stones were abundant, and it was close (about eighteen miles) to the mines. The ore was hauled about eight miles and freighted the remaining ten miles to the mill.

In his frequent correspondence with the newspapers in Tulare and Visalia, Farley described his trail over the mountains from Visalia, through what he described as "Olanche" Pass, and the descent to his "Olanche" millsite. In one of his letters, he refers to his route as an old Indian trail, starting at Deer Creek, and exiting near the west end of Owens Lake. He stated it was a good trail and an all-year route, according to his Indian guides. He refers to two of these guides as belonging to the "Olauche" tribe, and to the trail as "Visalia to Silver Mountain via Olauche Pass." This is the only reference to the spelling "Olauche." Possible explanations for this spelling is the fact that the editor might have mistaken the written "n" for a "u", or Farley's deviant spelling of the Yaudanchi guides. All other correspondence uses the spelling, "Olanche" or "Olancha". In The Handbook of California Indians, A. L. Kroeber attributes the name to the Yaudanchi, people of the Yokut tribe who inhabited the Sierra west of the mountain crest. In his early letters, Farley stated he was going to hire "Yaudanche" guides, as they were familiar with the trails. Further, since he stated he had named his mining company for the natives in the area, it is reasonable to assume that he also named the route for his guides.

Farley drew a map in 1861 which he called "Newly Discovered Tromontane Silver Mines in Southern California and West New Mexico (Map 4). In the map, the peak is referred to as "Olanche" as well as the millsite and springs. The original map is now in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, California. Farley's map indicates a spring and stream at the south end of Owens Lake. Presently there is no stream exiting the south end of the lake. During the earthquake of 1872, the lake level tilted east and north, changing the boundaries of the lake. The stream could possibly be Olancha Creek, and there are springs iin a field near

where Olancha Creek presently empties into the lake.



Farley's map of Coso Mines

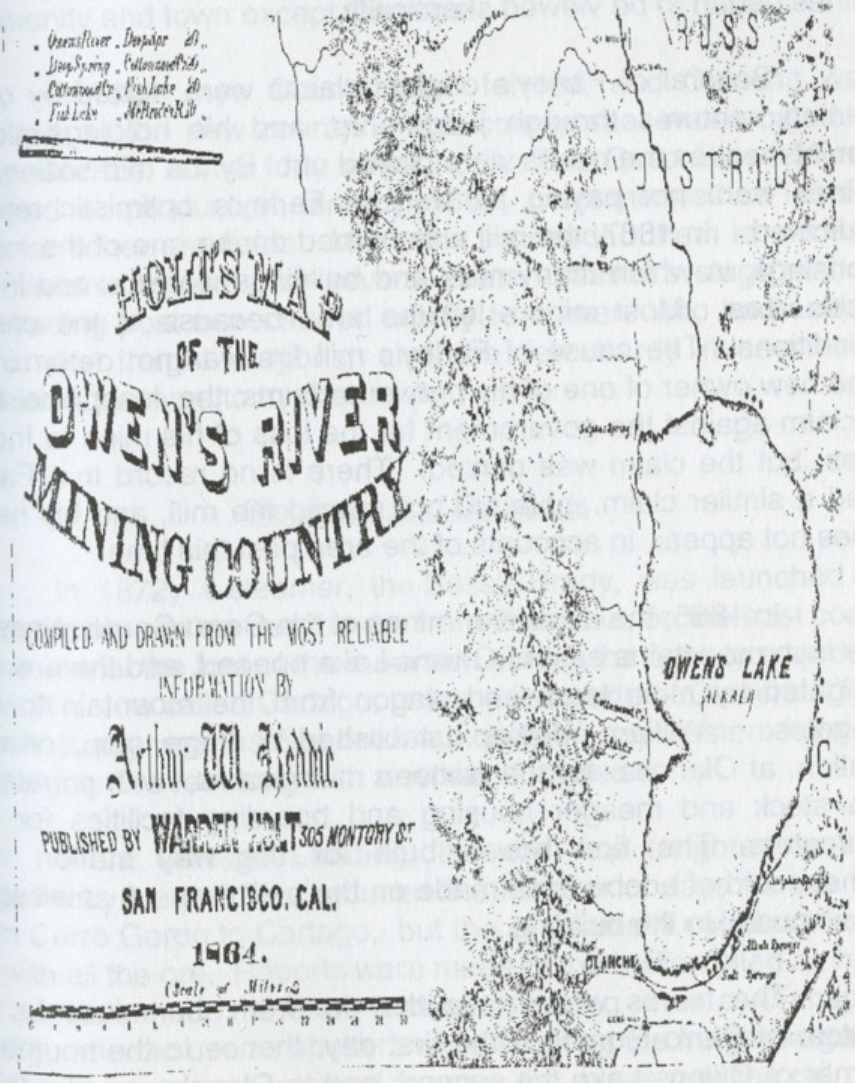
In his letters of 1860, Farley claimed over eighty people were living at the millsite, and described them as farmers and tradesmen. In his letters of 1862 and 1863, he referred to the many houses being built at Olancha and in his efforts to promote the building of a road over his trail, he stated, "Build roads to your towns and fertile farms and the town will build itself".

In later letters, Farley indicated he was having trouble keeping miners. He then brought twenty-five freed Negroes from Virginia, paying their transportation and promising them ten dollars per month. The Tulare County newspapers recorded their arrival in Visalia and being marched down the street for their departure for the mines. Most did not complete their year of work as agreed, however, and left the area for Southern California, or returned to the East.

By December of 1863, he related that he had built an eight stamp mill, with five amalgamating pans, a sawmill and a blacksmith shop. Farley's mill was built south of Olancha Creek, a short distance south and west of the present intersection of School and Cantlay Streets in Olancha. Presently, only remnants of the stone wall remain. In 1970, the area was located and cleared, and identified as the first business building in the town of Olancha. The area was designated as a historical site, and a marker was erected east of the highway at the junction of School Street and US Highway 395, largely through the efforts of Irene Carstensen, Postmaster of Olancha at the time.

Farley's efforts at securing the road from Visalia to Olancha produced a committee to survey and submit a cost estimate to build a road, which was done in 1860. The Committee to Mark the Coso Trail was headed by Pond and Dennison. Their report described the trail as exiting the mountains by Olancha Pass and coming down to "Haiwee" or "Dove Meadows". This is an area about ten miles south of Olancha, presently inundated by waters of the Haiwee Reservoir, a part of the Los Angeles aqueduct. The committee concluded that the road could be built for a cost of nine hundred dollars, plus the cost of building two bridges. No further action was taken on the road by the Tulare County government, although Farley continued to harangue them through his letters to the editor, citing the growing population, the

lengthy route around the mountains, and the time saving element of the shorter route.



Holt's map of mining area of eastern Tulare County

Other Mining and Freight Stations

Other mining ventures were spawned by Farley's holdings, and mines were located throughout the Coso and Panamint ranges. Many of the stockholders and financial backers were from San Francisco, the northern Sacramento Valley, and eastern states. Some mines were successful, others proved of little worth, and the glowing reports of high grade ore coming from the Coso Mines began to be viewed skeptically.

Several of Farley's original claims were seized by other mining ventures through judgments, and his holdings slowly diminished, as the mines were played out. By the mid-sixties, the mines were not paying as well as Farley's optimistic reports indicated. In 1867, the mill was burned during one of the Indian uprisings, in which many mills and buildings were burned in the Coso area. Most miners left the area because of the unsafe conditions. The cause of Farley's mill fire was not determined. The new owner of one of his previous claims, the Josephine, filed a claim against the government for the loss of his mine to Indian fires, but the claim was denied. There is no record that Farley filed a similar claim. He did not rebuild the mill, and his name does not appear in accounts of the area past this time.

In 1865, the rich silver mines of the Cerro Gordo mines, in the Inyo mountains east of Owens Lake opened, and the ore was freighted by mule team and wagon from the mountain to Los Angeles. William Walker established a stage stop, or way station, at Olancha for the sixteen mule teams, with corrals for the stock and meager housing and boarding facilities for the teamsters. The first house built for the way station was constructed of adobe brick made on the premises. A small store was housed in the building.

The teams would take the ore from the mines to the bottom of Cerro Gordo on the first day; thence to the southeast corner of Owens Lake the second; and to Olancha on the third. The distance covered from the bottom of the mountain to Olancha was approximately twenty miles. The trip to Los Angeles took up to twenty-one days.

Freight stations were spaced about a day's travel apart. From Olancha south, the next station was at Haiwee Meadows, now under water as a holding basin for the Los Angeles aqueduct; next was Cowan's, now called Dunmovin. Little Lake was next, where a considerable trading post was established by Hobart and Reed about 1864 to furnish mining supplies; thence to Coyote Holes, now Pearsonville, Red Rock Canyon, and Mojave. None of these freight stations evolved into a business-and-residential community and town except Olancha.

In 1866, Inyo County was formed, and Olancha was included in the new county. The county seat was located at Independence, some forty miles north. The Coso Silver Mines declined in production, and by 1867, most miners had left the area for richer ore fields. Mexicans succeeded them in working the mines in the area for several years. Walker's stage station and trading post now catered mostly to farmers who had settled there, the freight wagons, and the few hardy miners who remained, or came to try their luck.

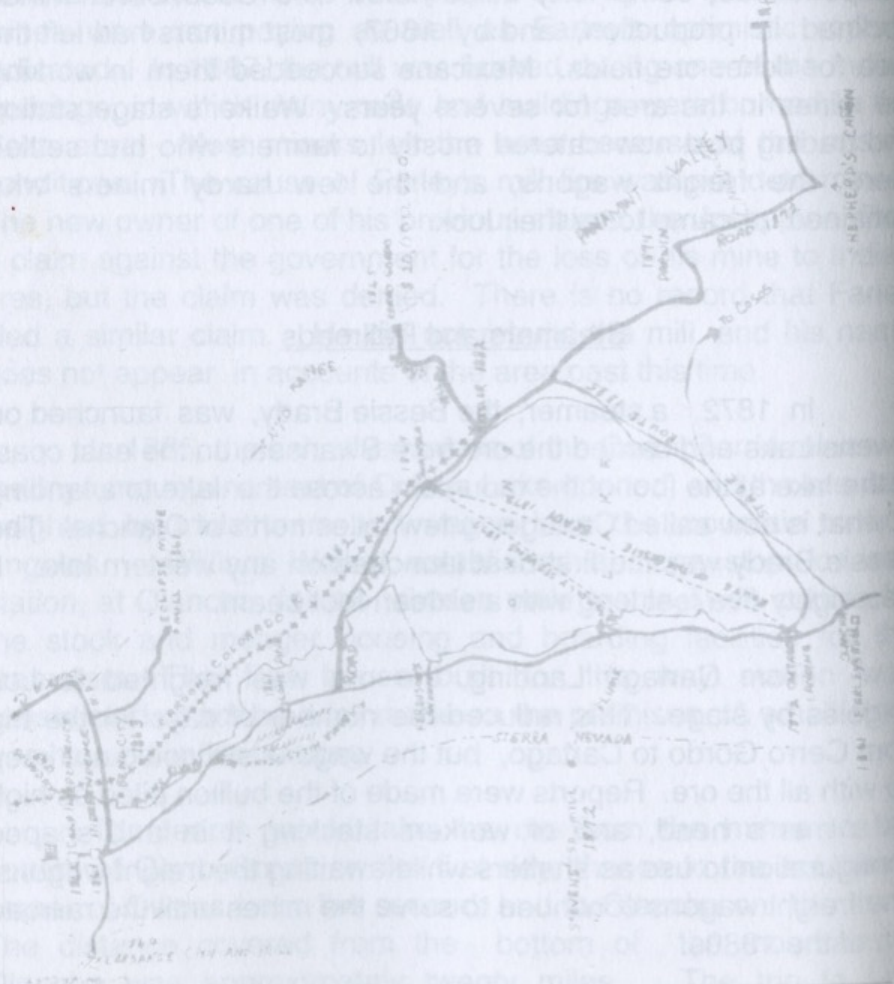
Steamers and Railroads

In 1872, a steamer, the Bessie Brady, was launched on Owens Lake and carried the ore from Swansea, on the east coast of the lake at the foot of the mountain across the lake to a landing at what is now called Cartago, a few miles north of Olancha. The Bessie Brady was the first boat launched on any western lake. It was eighty-five feet long with a sixteen foot beam.

From Cartago Landing, the ore was freighted to Los Angeles by stage. This reduced the number of days for the trip from Cerro Gordo to Cartago, but the wagons still could not keep up with all the ore. Reports were made of the bullion piled as high as a man's head, and of workers stacking it in a U-shaped configuration to use as shelters while awaiting the freight wagons. The freight wagons continued to serve the mines until the railroad era of the 1880s.

By 1883, the ore was being moved from Keeler, a townsite on the east side of Owens Lake, north on the narrow-gauge

railroad to Nevada, sharply curtailing the freight wagon business through Olancha. Travel to the southern California area was still served by freight wagons and carriages, however, until 1910, when a railroad was completed from Mojave to Lone Pine to facilitate movement of materials for the construction of the aqueduct for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The aqueduct traverses the Owens Valley from Mono County through Inyo County to San Fernando, in Los Angeles County.



Old map of mining area

Land Use

The early, continued occupation and development of the area can be attributed to location, water, arable land for subsistence farming, and available building materials. Another contributing factor was the agricultural nature of the settlement, which was not wholly dependent on the mines for subsistence.

First, the mill site was located on the only traveled trail through the valley from Los Angeles to Lone Pine, Bishop, and Nevada mining areas. The trail from Visalia through the mountains, which Farley used and promoted, exited a few miles south of the townsite, opening the area to settlement from the western Sierra. Second, water was available and plentiful from springs and Olancha Creek. The water table was sufficiently stable to afford wells on individual properties. Third, the soil was sandy loam, and with irrigation, sustained a variety of forage and food crops. Lumber was available from the nearby foothills, and after 1872, from the sawmill at Cottonwood Canyon, about ten miles north of Olancha. Stones suitable for building were plentiful. Thus, the early pioneers found the necessary elements conducive to settlement: food, water and shelter in a location that provided established ingress and egress.

With the opening of public lands to private ownership through the Homestead Act of 1862, farmers followed the miners into the area, attracted by accounts of fertile soil, fine meadows and plentiful water. They came to farm, to raise livestock, and to establish needed services: a freight station, a store, a blacksmith shop. A sawmill was constructed in Cottonwood Canyon, about ten miles north of Olancha, and supplied lumber for building. Carpenters and stone masons found work both at the mines and the emerging settlement. Ranchers used the place as a resting camp in moving their herds of cattle north of the saline lake to the areas of Independence and Bishop. Farmers stayed and established homes. They grew fruit and vegetable crops, as well as corn, alfalfa and other grain crops. Cattle, pigs, goats, sheep and chickens were raised. Hay crops were grown for harvesting and sales to the mining interests for the stock. Orchards were established.

Freight stations were established, often in conjunction with a ranch or farm operation, to provide fresh horses and board and room for the drivers of the freight wagons which were used to transport goods to and from the Los Angeles and San Joaquin Valley areas. The freight wagons were the means of transporting the ore from the mines, as well as other goods imported into the valley. The Owens River Stage Line was started in 1863. The trail was called the Three Flags Trail, or Midland Trail. Stage lines which transported passengers were established by the early 1870s.

Ranchers grazed their cattle in the meadows at Olancha, moving them to the higher elevations in the mountains to the west during the hot summer when feed became scarce. In the fall, the cattle were brought down from the mountains and pastured in the meadows along the lake, their feed supplemented by the grain crops grown on the farms and ranches.

Other than Farley's mill and blacksmith shop, and the freight stations, there was no other industrial business at the townsite. A small store stocking staples was operated in conjunction with the Walker Stage Depot. Residents traveled to Visalia for their necessities, or had them shipped in on the freight wagons from southern California. As Lone Pine and Independence became populated, the residents made the all day trip to Lone Pine for supplies.

Early voting records do not indicate that anyone living at Olancha was registered to vote prior to 1874. It is probable that the early settlers traveled to Visalia, or Lone Pine to vote. Names appearing on the voting register in Inyo County for the Olancha precinct in 1875 include William C. Smith, miner; Horace Bellows, miner; Samuel W. Cowles, clerk; John J. Stewart, laborer; Captain Titchworth, steamboat captain; William Walker, hotel keeper; and John P. Zimmerman, laborer. Prior to this time, the community was included as a part of the Lone Pine voting district. By 1900, there were thirteen voters in the Olancha precinct: Alonzo Brown, Ira Wilson, Henry Dyke, Fred Dyke, Angel Duarte, William T. Grant, John L. Laird, William Mudget, George King, Webster H. Walker, Edward Walker, Charles W. Whittock and Agustus Walker. Some of these names are still associated with land

holdings in Olancha. Other residents may have been registered in another precinct, either Lone Pine to the north, or in Visalia. The 1880 census showed about one hundred people living at Olancha.

The records of land transactions in the Bureau of Land Management files indicate that land was being secured for ranching and farming interests at the townsite. Erasmus D. French filed for 160 acres in December, 1862; John A. Harmon, 1863; John D. Thom, Thomas Passmore, John Albrecht, and W. P. Bailey in 1870. Two patents, one in 1864 to A .E. Cowles and in 1864 to Agustus Walker appear in the files of the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management Records of Land Transactions:1860-1900. Descendants of William Walker have the original grant to land patented in 1871 which was signed by President Ulysses S. Grant. Originally known as the Walker Ranch, it was known later as the Brown Ranch until the 1960s, when the property was sold by the family. Most of these filings were for 160 acres, and in the area south of the lake and east of the stage trail. Some of these people later moved to the more promising mining areas around Independence and on into Nevada. Some remained in the northern part of the valley.

Later land transactions show many Hispanic surnames, indicating the influence of the Mexican residents in the area. Epitacio Gomez filed on land north of Agustus Walker's ranch in 1884. Romero purchased land from Agustus Walker in 1926. His descendants still live in the Lone Pine region, where a sizeable Mexican population existed. Two fields north of the townsite are still locally referred to as the Romero and Gomez field, indicating that the present residents still refer to the original owner, even though later owners of the properties were Euro-Americans.

First Settlements

Agustus Walker, a surveyor who came from the San Joaquin Valley, filed on land in Olancha in 1864, and established a ranch. He was a native of Switzerland, and had previously come through the valley with a military surveying party in 1859. He obtained water rights to Olancha Creek and Carthage (later Cartago) Creek. In order to increase the water flow, he dug a channel at the foot of Oak Creek Canyon northward from Falls Creek to Olancha Creek. This stream traverses the foothills in a north-south direction from The Oaks, a former pack station, to Olancha Creek at the mouth of Olancha Canyon, and is called Walker Creek. The road to The Oaks, formerly called Oaks Road, is now called Walker Creek Road. The channel of the old creek bed can still be seen, about four miles south of Olancha.

Some of Walker's holdings were sold to J. W. Lacey in 1878, who had come west from Missouri. Lacey, and his son, Mark, later ranched in the Cosos, at Junction Ranch and Centennial. In 1923, Mark Lacey, son of J. W. Lacey, purchased land from Walker. He was at the time managing the ranch for Walker. In 1928, on Walker's death, Mark Lacey purchased the ranch, and additional land from Agustus Walker's estate. The ranch was operated by Mark Lacey, and later, his son, John, until the property and water rights were sold to the City of Los Angeles in the 1980s. The land is now leased by John Lacey and continues in operation as the Lacey Ranch. The ranch house has been demolished. Mark's son, John, and grandson, Mark, are the third and fourth generation to continue operation of the ranch. The Lacey brand is the Double Circle L.

During his lifetime, Mark Lacey was active in civic matters, and served several terms as county supervisor for the district, as well as a member of the school board, both the Olancha Elementary and Lone Pine High School. His wife, Elizabeth, taught at the Olancha school for a number of years.

Tom Lacey, Mark's brother, purchased the Cecil Hatfield land, but did not engage in ranching. He worked as a storekeeper, and later, for the City of Los Angeles after the aqueduct was constructed. In his later years, he made his home at Mark's ranch

and worked there until his death. His former wife and son moved from the valley to the northern San Joaquin valley. His son became a veterinarian.

William Walker, no relation to Agustus Walker, filed on land in 1871, and established a ranch and freight station. A widower, he was formerly of Missouri. His land adjoined the Agustus Walker ranch on the north. One of his daughters married Thomas Passmore, who worked at the freight station. Passmore was active in civic affairs in Lone Pine, and when Inyo County was established, he became the first County Clerk. Later, he was elected sheriff, and was shot while attempting to arrest a suspected criminal in Lone Pine.

While Passmore was at Walker's, he added a small store, obtaining supplies from Lone Pine and Los Angeles via freight stages. During the time the store was operated, it was variously known as "Walkers", "The Oasis" and "Cottonwood", followed by "Store and Post Office". Living quarters were also added to the original adobe building.

The town had no public meeting place, and the freight station served as both a business and social gathering place. Some consultants related their family memories of the music and dances in the building. Since the postoffice was also housed here, it was considered the business meeting place also, and matters of local interest were discussed and resolved at the location. Later another daughter of William Walker married Alonzo Brown, who had come from Sierraville to work at the ranch in 1874. George Brown, Alonzo's son, inherited the ranch from his aunt, the widow of Thomas Passmore. The ranch remained in the Walker (Brown) family until the 1960s, when it was sold.

The original adobe house survived the devastating earthquake of 1872, although a large crack remained visible in one wall. The adobe building was demolished in the 1960s, as it was unsafe to occupy. The larger, wood frame building which had been built adjoining it remained standing until a few years ago, when it, too, was razed. George Brown was born in the adobe building and lived on the ranch until a few years before his death.

In addition to the early businesses, and later the ranch, George had many interests. He was widely known for his braided reins, which were made from leather tanned by him at the ranch. For a few years, he experimented with raising four-horned sheep. The young bear referred to earlier was found in a corral here one morning, and was chained to a tree for a time, attracting the attention of residents and tourists. After about two months in captivity, the bear succeeded in breaking the chain and was gone one morning when they went to check on him. He was not seen again.

George and his wife, the former Ada Cline, raised a son and daughter, both of whom still reside in the valley. Ada was a member of a prominent pioneer family in the Lone Pine area.

The Walker brand was the "W". The Brown Ranch brand is the Upside Down Heart.

Agustus Walker, who originally held the rights to the water of both Olancha and Cartago Creeks, allowed William Walker to divert a portion of the water to his land for irrigation. After using the water for a number of years, William Walker filed a claim for a share of the water in 1879, and was granted use of a portion of the stream. These two adjacent ranches held the water rights to Olancha Creek, and fronted on the stage trail, which became the highway through the town. Later, William Butler was granted use of a portion of the water for his freight station and tourist cabins, situated west of the two properties, on land purchased from William Walker in 1914.

Agustus Walker held a note from William Walker in the amount of two thousand dollars. This note had lain among papers, largely ignored, for many years. In 1927, when Agustus Walker was near death, George Brown approached him to settle the note. The note, with accrued interest, amounted at that time to over $80,000. The parties agreed to settle this longstanding lien for face value plus one year's interest.

Beveridge Hunter bought property west of the Lacey ranch in Olancha in 1926. He also had inherited Hunter Ranch in Saline Valley, east of the Inyo mountains. His father, W. L.

Hunter, had ridden horseback from the east coast to Virginia City after the Civil War, but returned to Virginia. Soon after, he returned to California via ship and migrated to Cerro Gordo, where he worked. While there, he filed for land and water rights on the east side of the Inyo Range in Saline Valley. He had a ranch, mined gold and silver, and operated pack trains for the Cerro Gordo mine during the 1870s. It is for him that Hunter Mountain and the Hunter ranch in Saline Valley is named.

During his residency there, W. L. Hunter learned the Shoshoni language, and befriended the Native Americans. He assisted several of them to obtain land grants to property. He was held in high regard by the Native Americans, and some families adopted his name. Some of their descendants still live in Inyo County.

Several Native American consultants told of gathering "pinon honey" from the pine trees on Hunter mountain. This sticky liquid is formed from insects laying their eggs in the pinon trees. It hangs in strands and shines like icicles. They maintain that this is the only area, and the only kind of tree where the honey can be found. It does not occur every year. When a honey tree is found, they rush to gather the liquid in any available container, pots, baskets, even caps or other clothing articles, since it only lasts for a day. It is said to be sweeter than "regular" honey.

In his earlier years, Beveridge traveled with the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show as a trick roper. After settling in Olancha, Beveridge raised his cattle on Hunter Ranch, and for a time grazed them in the Sierra meadows in the summer. Later, he grazed them on Hunter Mountain. He and his sons captured and broke wild horses in the Saline and Death Valley areas prior to the removal of the stock by the US Park Service when they were deemed a threat to the vegetation of the Death Valley National Monument. Beveridge also spoke the Shoshoni language and enjoyed a good relationship with the Native Americans.

Beveridge's son, Roy, purchased the old Pugsley ranch at the southeastern corner of the town boundaries, on Cactus Flat Road. He and his wife, Joy, built their house in 1959. They live

on the ranch with their son, John, and continue raising cattle and some horses. He no longer ropes the wild horses. Of those days, Roy says it was a thrill to capture the wild horses, and that he grew to know the herds well enough so that if an individual wanted a certain type of horse, he could rope that kind. He roped the horses both in California and Nevada, and seldom had a horse that had to go to the "glue factory". Most were sold to individuals or ranching establishments.

He admits to knowing "a little" of the Shoshoni language. He and his son represent the third and fourth generation of family ranchers in the Olancha area. He still owns Hunter Mountain Ranch and the water rights, although he finds the many environmental regulations from the different agencies confining. The Hunter brand is "26", the brand registered by his grandfather.

Other Early Settlers

There were many land filings in the first two decades of the century, and a good number of defaults as economically unstable conditions forced people to move to other areas. The sand and soda ash prevented expansion to the east, and there was not enough available meadow land to support large ranches.

With the ranch buildings of the Brown and Lacey ranches separated by pastureland, subsequent businesses and residences developed at either end, with an expanse in between, as those leasing or buying from the Agustus Walker properties built near his ranch house, and others developing in the open area south of William Walker's ranch. Since land was available both east and south of the two ranches, there was more development of both ranches and businesses in that direction. Land west and north of Agustus Walker's ranch was developed residentially to a lesser extent, with smaller parcels being the norm.

William Pugsley established a farm and goat ranch at the southeast corner of the area. He supplemented the agricultural business with employment with the railroad, until he lost his legs in a railway accident.

In 1913, Jacob Bibbey also started a goat ranch north of Pugsley's. He and his family moved to the town proper after a violent sandstorm buried his goat herd. He also drove the school bus during his farming days, and after the move to the town. Jake wore "long-handled" underwear both summer and winter, because, he said, it kept the cold out in the winter, and the heat out in the summer. In his retirement, Jake spent hours reminiscing about the early days of Olancha. He also doted on his granddaughter, whom he delighted in teaching salty language. She was an apt pupil, and the despair of her paternal grandmother, Elizabeth "Mother" Hiter, who had moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Olancha to help care for her.

Charles Fitzhugh farmed in the same vicinity as the Bibbey Ranch. He had tried to establish an orchard, but lack of water and severe temperatures prevented the venture from flourishing. His wife taught school in the one-room schoolhouse. He, along with Bibbey and Pugsley, served as postmaster at Olancha at various times. Fitzhugh and Pugsley had the post office in a portion of their homes.

Nathan Lotto filed on land in 1912, and built a stone house. This house still stands, but has undergone several remodelings. The stained glass windows originally in the building have been removed, windows have been added and enlarged, and a larger fireplace has been added. The sixteen inch thick walls have not been covered inside nor out, retaining the rough surface of the original building. The sturdy house has withstood time, weather and earthquakes. It is presently occupied, as well as a smaller, converted washhouse to the rear.

Lotto had filed on a defaulted homestead filing, and donated eighty acres back to the former owner so that she could remain in her home and open a school. As with many of the early homestead filings, this was one of the earliest filed, and defaulted, by Erasmus French and his sister. After Lotto had donated the land back to French's sister, Erasmus refiled on the land and obtained title to both the land and the house. This led to Lotto referring to him as "the nester", a derogatory term.

Lotto moved to the Los Angeles area in the 1930s, but

continued to make regular trips to Olancha, where he would spend a month or so before returning to the Los Angeles area. He traveled by bus, and while in Olancha, walked to the postoffice, store and cafes. He lived frugally and dressed in worn and patched clothing, although rumors, never proven, circulated of his wealth. He and his wife were considered eccentric, and did not socialize to a great extent with the residents.

William Butler purchased land from William Walker and established a freight station west and north of the original Walker station, in 1914. He homesteaded the property and obtained water rights to a portion of Olancha Creek. In 1926, he built a motel, the Rancho Olancha, and Taylor Johnston, who had mining interests in the area, wired it for electricity in 1930. Butler was supervisor for the southern district of the county, including Olancha, and was a star route mail carrier, covering the distance to Darwin and Keeler. He erected a building for a post office in the early 1920s.

Edward "Blackie" Dodge bought the Pedro property at the northern town boundary, about 1920. He and his family resided on the property until it was sold in the last decade. Dodge was engaged in construction and earth moving in the area, and built several of the roads in the town. He also did prospecting and mining on a small scale. Members of the family still reside in the area, and in Lone Pine.

...Ed Dodge - he's the feller hereabouts that builds our roads and does a heap o' good thereby fer the country--see Ed fer any work to be done with his modern road machinery.
Olancha Journal c.1940

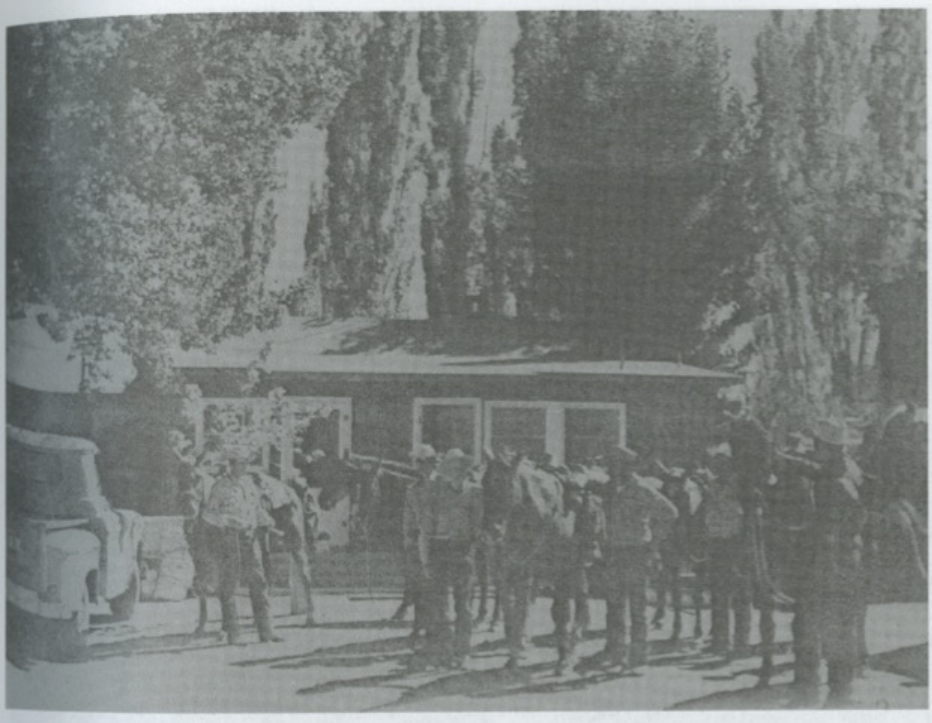
Albert George and his family were early settlers just south of Highway 190 east of the Cuddahy property. His children attended Olancha schools. They have remained in the Owens Valley most of the time.

For the most part, all of these early settlers were farmers or ranchers, with the William Walker enterprise the only industry or business in the town since the closure of Farley's Mill. Many other filings were made and abandoned or discontinued. This is

not a complete listing of filings during the first decades of the settlement, but a synopsis of some of the early pioneers within the town's boundaries whose names are still associated with local sites.

Highway sign marking Farley's Mill location. W. Olson photo

Remains of Farley's mill. I. Carstensen photos



Ranch house on Lacey Ranch. Photo State Dept. Education

Agustus Walker, owner of Walker ranch, later Lacey Ranch. Inyo Independent photo

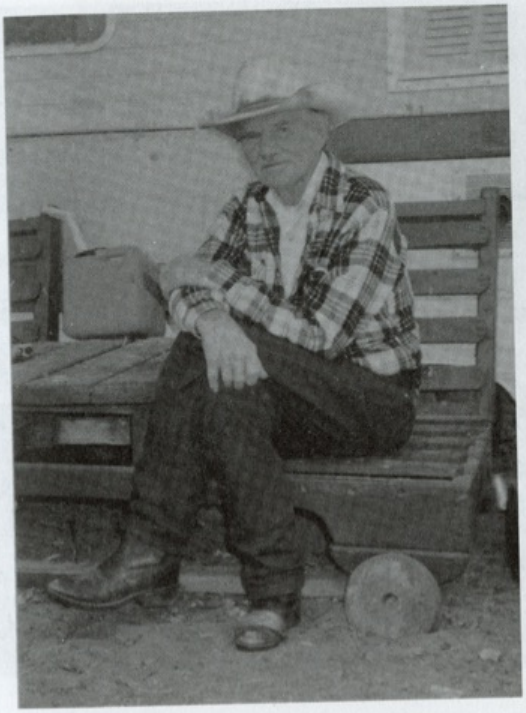
Mark and Elizabeth Lacey Photo State Dept. Education

At camp in the mountains: Frank Chrysler, Russ Spainhower, Mark Lacey, Fred Moore. A. Brown Photo

Thomas Passmore -Inyo Independent photo

Brown's store and postoffice, 1910 Left to right: Alden Brown, Web Walker, Leca, Herbert and Melita Williams. A. Brown collection photo

Fitzhugh property, circa 1912. V. Lemon photo



Roy Hunter, Senior Citizen of Olancha. He is the oldest native of Olancha, having lived there since infancy. W. Olson photo

Ed Dodge house at north end of town boundaries, circa 1920. I. Carstensen Photo

Ada Cline Brown, center, with George Brown's sister, left, and mother, right, at the Brown "Oasis" Store and Post Office, circa 1917 Photo: A. Brown Photo

Lotto house. W. Olson Photo

Wash house east of Lotto residence. W. Olson Photo

Tie house behind "stone building". W. Olson Photo

Interior wall, 16 inches thick, Lotto house
Photo W. Olson

CHAPTER FOUR

FOLKLORE AND LEGENDS

No narrative of a community would be complete without the inclusion of local folktales, folklore, bits of historical fact and personal accounts of events concerning past residents and localities of the area. The folk history of a community is an indication of the way in which the residents view themselves and their environment. The stories themselves, by being preserved through oral history, signify the importance the residents place on personages, places and tradition. Some of these histories are preserved in oral form, handed down over the years. Others can be substantiated by factual accounts in archival sources. Most are a mixture of the oral and published accounts.

Folklore which is not substantiated by written or published sources can vary for a number of reasons: the perception of the events by the story teller; whether the author was a participant or observer; opposing viewpoints of participants; a bit of "white washing" to justify actions taken; and, of course, an embellishment to enhance the story itself. Names become confused through the repeated telling, and sites are sometimes relocated to benefit the story itself.

Included in these stories are oral reminisces of older residents, substantiated by other consultants and/or archival sources. Some are recorded in published accounts. All of them, often told by residents, reflect their concept of Olancha and its surrounds and give us the flavor of the community and its participants.

Dirty Socks

About three miles east of the town, north of State Route 190, there is a warm artesian well, high in mineral content. The springs have formed a small pool about sixty feet in diameter and lie just south of the southern end of Owens Lake. The water maintains a degree of near 90 degrees Fahrenheit year round, and emits a strong sulfur odor. A pipe was sunk in 1917 by a company seeking fresh water, and the water bubbles from this pipe continuously.

The origin of the name is obscure but the most prevalent theory is that the name was derived from the fact that miners in the Coso mountains south of the springs traveled there regularly to bathe and wash their clothes, hanging their laundered socks on the surrounding sagebrush to dry, and sometimes forgetting to gather them. Others maintain the name derives from the odor of the water.

Another possibility derives from the fact that many old claims in the west were named the "Dirty Sock" claim, due to the practice of old-time miners, who would squeeze the amalgam through an old sock. The mercury would pass through the fabric, but the gold would not. Old maps of the area, however, do not show any mine so named. Also, little significant mining was being done at the time the pool was formed.

Some people maintain that the water and mud are beneficial to the body and skin, and have bathed in the springs and applied mudpacks to the body in an effort to cure arthritis and other ailments, and to beautify the skin. The mud turns green as it dries on the skin, and in one instance, resulted in an unexpected incident.

Two ladies had gone to the pool to swim and had smeared their faces with mud to eradicate their age lines. Upon hearing a car door slam, they paddled to the edge of the pool and raised up to see who was approaching. An elderly couple was walking toward the pool when they looked up, and with horrified

expressions, turned and dashed for their car. The tires threw sand as the car spun around and roared away at top speed. The ladies turned to each other to ask what frightened the pair, and realized their appearance: slicked back hair, green faces, eyes outlined in white. When they finished laughing, they opined that a new legend had been added to the lore of Dirty Socks: two slimy green sea monsters raised up out of the water "right in front of us!" Although the springs have long been a gathering place for party goers of the area, no widespread reports of green monsters have been reported. It would be hard to dissuade one couple, however.

In the 1950s, the county briefly took over management of the springs after a private enterprise failed in an attempt to commercialize the springs as a health spa and sell packaged mud from the pool, much as the hot springs at Coso were marketed early in the century. Some buildings were erected as shelter, but they were torn down and the wood used for firewood for bonfires by party-goers. The area is now periodically cleaned of debris and broken glass by local residents.

The earthquake which occurred in 1972 caused a new vent to open south of the pipe, and the water temperature dropped several degrees. Water emitted through the recent vent was in greater volume than that emerging from the pipe. There was also a decided decline in the odor from the pool.

At the time the new vent opened, a smaller vent opened east of the original pool, and is now larger than the original pool. It has a strong odor, and is about the same temperature as the original pool, which has regained both its warmth and redolent odor.

Hog Rogers

Many mining-era towns in the old West have a legend of the proprietor of an isolated rest stop killing lone wayfarers and serving their remains to later travelers. Olancha has its own villain of this nature, with several variations of the location, names of the perpetrator and victims, and final disposition of the incident. The proprietor was variously named E. M. King, Hog Rogers or Hog

Roberts. The victims were named Hog Rogers or Hog Roberts, and were either lonely cowboys, a brother of the Nevada governor, George Nye, or unknown travelers. This narration will use the name Hog Rogers, the name used in published newspaper accounts. The year was 1865, a year before Inyo County was formed. The area was still a part of Tulare County, with the county seat in Visalia, on the west side of the Sierra.

All accounts agree that a man, Hog Rogers, located on property between Olancha and Cartago. He furnished sleeping quarters and served meals to passing travelers. In June of that year, a man named E. M. King appeared at the ranch saying he was a preacher. In subsequent months, King continued serving meals, but Rogers had not been seen. A pair of travelers, remarking on the tasty meal they had just eaten, were informed by King that they had dined on the late Hog Rogers, and that a piece of his skin had been made into a razor strop. He told them he had fed other parts of the body to the chickens and animals.

The travelers reported the incident at Independence, where an Army post was located, and King was taken there and placed in the custody of the soldiers stationed there. He escaped and made his way back to the Visalia area, where he was later arrested and tried. He was hanged in December of that year, for, as one newspaper article reported, "the dastardly thing he did to his partner". In the manner of journalistic customs of the time, lurid details of the crime were printed as the trial progressed.

Variations of the account include the claim that the victim was a brother of Nevada governor George Nye, who enlisted the help of Pinkerton's in finding the missing brother. One consultant indicated that the culprit was captured by a group of citizens and hanged from a stone arch at the ranch. Yet another ending indicates he escaped and was never caught, but the news items relating to the event indicate otherwise.

The Rogers building was located about two and one-half miles north of Olancha, in the Pedro field just south of the Cabin Bar Ranch east of the highway. A few years ago, the field was cleared and the remains of the stone building were piled into a heap in the middle of the field. The operator of the bulldozer

clearing the field stated that east of the building, he uncovered many human bones, with the exception of skulls. He stated that the bones were re-interred and left where they were found. Since no official examination or investigation was ever made, it remains unknown if the bones were, in fact, human, or if they were of Euro-American or Native American origin. A fairly large Native American village was situated nearby, and a burial ground has been identified in the area. However, in perpetuating the story, this incident is referred to locally as "digging up King's boneyard".

Origin of the Name "Olancha"

Minnard H. Farley, who established a mill here in 1860 to refine ores from his Olancha Mine, in the Coso mountains southeast of the townsite, is credited with naming the community. He is also regarded as responsible for the naming of Olancha Creek, which bisects the town, and Olancha Peak, directly west of the town. Farley mentions in some of his correspondence that he secured the services of Indian guides of the "Olauche" tribe, who lived west of the crest of the Sierra Nevada. This spelling is possibly a corruption of the name "Yaudanche", a name for the people of the Yokuts Indian tribe living in that area. The name Olancha is attributed by A. L. Kroeber to be such in his Handbook of California Indians. In his earliest correspondence and maps, Farley spelled the name "Olanche", but later it was changed to "Olancha", and that has become the standard spelling.

In The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 11, the name "Olanche" is attributed to the Western Shoshoni. The meaning is loosely translated as "high plain" or "high wave". This spelling, "Olanche", was used by Farley in his earliest published communications. The area of his mine was in Shoshoni territory in the Coso mountains. Further, he stated that he had named his mines the Coso Mining District after the Native Americans living there. Advertisements and local residents refer to this derivation of the name. Present day Native American consultants stated they did not know the source of the name.

As an intriguing postscript as to the reason Farley chose Olanche as the name of the the settlement, he traveled

extensively with military and mining units, and refers to his trips to Honduras in the early 1850s. Here, he was attached to a mining expedition in the province of Olanche. The location is described as a high plain. His map of 1860 describes the area around Olancha as a "High open plain". Interestingly, a port city which served the Honduran Olanche mines was named Cartago, the name given to the town just north of Olancha by the Southern Pacific Railroad when the rail was laid through the valley in 1910. The name "Cartago Landing" is referred to in local and Visalia papers during the time the Bessie Brady was hauling ore across the lake. The rich silver mine east of Keeler was named Cerro Gordo, and, again, there was a "fat mountain" in Honduras named Cerro Gordo, in close proximity to the Olanche plain. The name Cerro Gordo in Inyo County is attributed to Pedro Flores, an early discoverer of the rich ores of the area. Although there is no indication that Farley was responsible for naming these other locations, it is a remarkable coincidence. For the record, however, Farley will receive credit for only "Olancha".

Sleeping Beauty

At early sunrise or late sunset, the southern slope of Olancha Peak west of Olancha appears to take on the shape of a face in profile. Other, lower peaks rising south of Olancha Peak form mounds roughly profiling the body, rising at the chest and ending in smaller peaks at the "foot" of the figure. The "feet" of the figure are represented by Haiwee Mountain. This formation is locally referred to as Sleeping Beauty.

Another smaller formation similar in shape but with a more pronounced "chest" rise, lies south of the town of Darwin, some thirty miles east and south of Olancha. Local residents there refer to the formation as "Sleeping Princess". These names, of course, are of Euro-American origin. These human shaped mountain peaks are found in several locations throughout the western mountain regions, from the Rockies westward. Most are given names referring to the local Native American tribes residing in the area, such as Paiute Chief or Paiute Man. Local Native American consultants said the respective peaks were given the name of Indian Chief, "Nua Pumbi", and Indian Woman, "Nua Waipu". The

Shoshoni meaning of the word Inyo is "Dwelling Place of the Great Spirit". Their name for "home" or "spirit home" is "eonui".

Consultants told of the Darwin mountain being called the old woman, a reference to the legend of the angry woman who could not find her children, and spewed fire all over in her frustration. Children were cautioned not to go too far afield, and to be home before dark or the old woman would get them. A threat aimed at misbehavior was "S'nosi", roughly translated as "She'll get you!"

The following creation myth is a Paiute version similar to several in the Great Basin Native American tribes, and is condensed here.

'When earth became habitable, the first man to be created was Hy-Nan-Nu. His mother was a winged creature, a spirit or bird, perhaps Hai-Wai, the dove. The Paiutes were created from rocks. A particular rock which is far up on the creeks west of Owens Valley and having resemblance to human form was Mother Rock. After the Paiutes had become numerous in Owens Valley, Hy-Nan-Nu came from the southeast to teach a better mode of living. He was not a Paiute but came from some other tribe and remained many years. Legends tell of feats of strength and daring. He went about doing good, and taught the people to be happy and not to worry about misfortunes. He was always looking for his mother. One day he walked up the creek and passed over the mountains.'

Although attributed to the Paiute lore, it can be found in other tribal mythology. The recurring theme is a person or being who performs good deeds or great feats, and is searching for mother. It usually involves a mountain peak or pile of rocks representing the mother. A bird is usually the messenger. The dove is sometimes a raven or loon. Hai-wai was also the name given to the dove by people on the western range of the Sierra. Hai-wai, the dove in Paiute language, was translated to Haiwee by the early pioneers. The name referred to springs, at a location now under water of a reservoir of the Los Angeles aqueduct, south and east of Olancha.

The Postmaster's Pony

After the railroad was established through Inyo County, mail was brought by train, and left in a box at the Olancha siding. Outgoing mail was picked up from the box on the southbound run. One postmaster and train crew developed a system so that the train would not have to come to a full stop for the mail exchange.

When the train came to the top of Cowan's Grade, the engineer would blow his whistle. On hearing the whistle, the postmaster would just have time to grab the mailbag, mount his little black pony which was always saddled and ready, and gallop up to the railroad. As the train passed, the postmaster would throw his outgoing mailbag into the open car, and the rail clerk would toss off the incoming mailbag, which the postmaster would pick up and gallop his pony back to the postoffice.

One day, the postmaster was indulging in conversation and refreshments with some friends and did not respond quickly enough when the whistle blew. The well-trained pony did not wait for the errant postmaster and mailbag, but galloped off to the railroad siding, and as soon as the incoming mailbag alit, turned and galloped back to his station outside the postoffice. Needless to say, the outgoing mail was a day late, and another trip had to be made to retrieve the incoming mail. Descendants of Webster Walker believe this happened during his tenure as postmaster, 1891 to 1912.

Paiute and MacGuire Massacres

Although the locale of this story is outside the residence areas of Olancha, it is one of the stories repeated as part of the lore of the area. Further, it marks the finale of the wars between the Native Americans and the settlers in the area.

In 1864, the MacGuire family established a freight station at Haiwee Meadows at a location now covered by waters of Haiwee Reservoir. At the end of the year, MacGuire traveled to Big Pine to purchase some equipment and asked two men who

were at the station to stay with his family until he returned, since the trip would take two days.

The next day, the two men appeared at Little Lake, about seventeen miles south, each suffering wounds. They told the innkeeper that they had been awakened by fire and found the roof blazing. They related they were attacked by Indians using torches, stones and guns. The heat became too intense to remain inside, and the men escaped, but Mrs. MacGuire remained inside with her son.

That same morning, two riders came upon the burned dwelling. They found both Mrs. MacGuire and her son outside the ruins of the house, both with numerous arrows in their bodies. Neither survived.

A messenger was sent to Lone Pine, and a party of men went to the area, camping at Olancha. Upon reaching the burned station, some of the men followed the trail of the two men to Little Lake, where they were found, told their story, and were told to leave the country and not return. The search party then rejoined the others at the MacGuire station, and followed a trail to an Indian camp near the northern end of Owens Lake, just south of Lone Pine. They rode into Lone Pine, and reported the massacre. That night, four Paiute prisoners were killed, reportedly when they tried to escape.

With feelings running high, a few nights later a group of citizens went to the Indian camp, ambushing the camp and shooting many of the Indians. Others were driven into the lake. About forty Native Americans, men, women and children, were killed. This was the last notable incident in the conflict with the Native Americans in the valley.

Several Native American consultants recounted this ambush, and stated that a few escaped across the ice on the river. One Shoshoni consultant related that her grandmother and mother, who at the time was an infant, were two of the escapees across the ice. They went up Tuttle Creek west of Lone Pine and hid, and a few days later, made their way north to Big Pine where Native Americans provided for them. They subsequently made

their way back to their home in Saline Valley.

One consultant related that it was actually Shoshoni who burned down the house and killed the MacGuires, then left Paiute arrows to throw suspicion on the Paiutes. This was in retribution for the Paiutes hunting in their territory. He stated that it was a Shoshoni camp that was ambushed at the lake, and mostly Shoshoni who got killed.

The prevailing belief is that the Paiutes were to blame for the incident. The question remains as to whether the two men were told to leave the country because of a suspicion that they were the guilty parties, or whether they were deemed cowardly to escape and leave Mrs. MacGuire and her son to die. The reports to the newspapers by Hobart and Reed, who had the station and store at Little Lake, were not clear on this point.

Hogback Creek Incident

In 1863, a large contingent of Native Americans was gathered at Fort Independence for relocation to Fort Tejon. Escorted by soldiers on horseback, the Native Americans were marched on foot down the valley. Attempted escapes were fairly common, some successful. Soldiers fired on the escapees, killing many of them. One Native American consultant said the soldiers shot the men and boys on little provocation, and "misused" the women and girls.

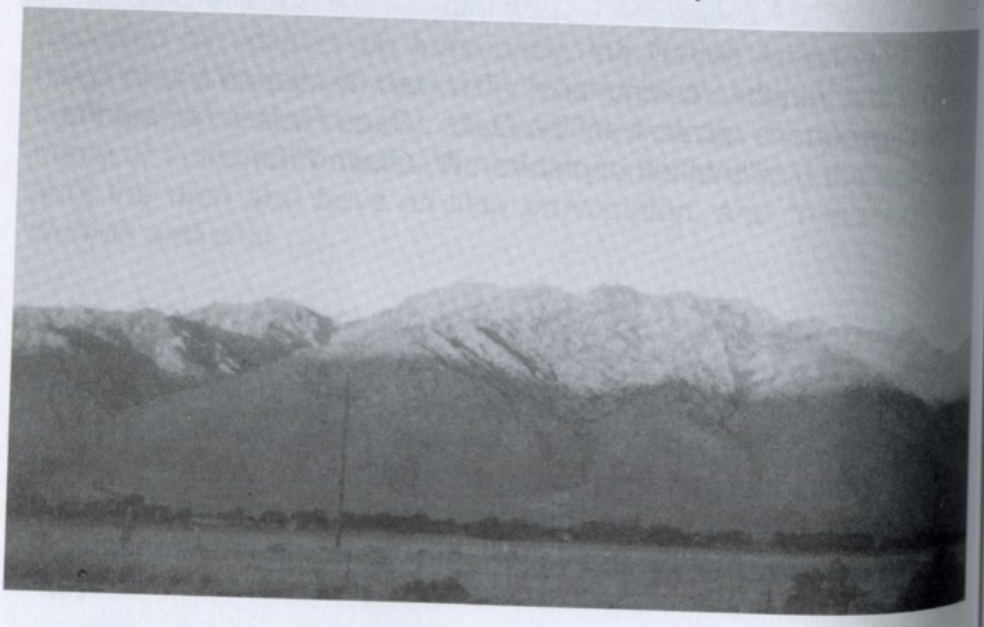
Near Hogback Creek, west of the present Haiwee Reservoir, a group attempted to escape up Hogback Canyon. Among them was a mother carrying her baby. She had reached some pine trees when she was shot. She struggled up and placed the baby up in the limbs of the pine tree out of sight, then fell. When the soldiers reached the canyon mouth and ascertained that she was dead, they left without discovering the baby.

Next day, some Native Americans came to the place to see if there were any survivors, and found the baby. They took him with them, and a Native American family raised him. He lived

in Lone Pine most of his life, and was quite aged when he died. Some consultants stated that he had suffered a gunshot through the back of his neck, others said he had not been injured.

Fig 76: Olancha, looking west. The dark V-shaped line in right background is location of The Oaks. Sage Flats is behind the hills to left of picture. W. Olson Photo

Shirley Elmer, who lived here as a child, recalls "the old swimmin' hole" at Dirty Socks W. Olson photo



Olancha Peak, The "head" of Sleeping Beauty. W. Olson photo

Sleeping Beauty, from head to foot. The "feet" are represented by Haiwee mountain. S. Elmer photo

CHAPTER FIVE

FREIGHT STATIONS AND RAILROADS

Freight, or way, stations were scattered at regular intervals along the roads in the valley to provide relief teams and meager accommodations for the freight handlers and passengers. The Walker way station also served as a store, or trading post, bringing some supplies from Lone Pine and Independence for the convenience of the residents. Other supplies and equipment were freighted in from southern California cities. Since a trip to Lone Pine was an all day venture, this small store in Olancha served the immediate needs of the residents.

William Walker, and later his son-in-law, Thomas Passmore, had the first way station. The Walker station at Olancha existed in conjunction with the ranch from the early 1870s until it became obsolete with the coming of the automobile.

William Butler, supervisor of the district, bought property from William Walker in 1914, and operated another early way station which later evolved into the Rancho Olancha Motel. It was situated west and north of the William Walker station.

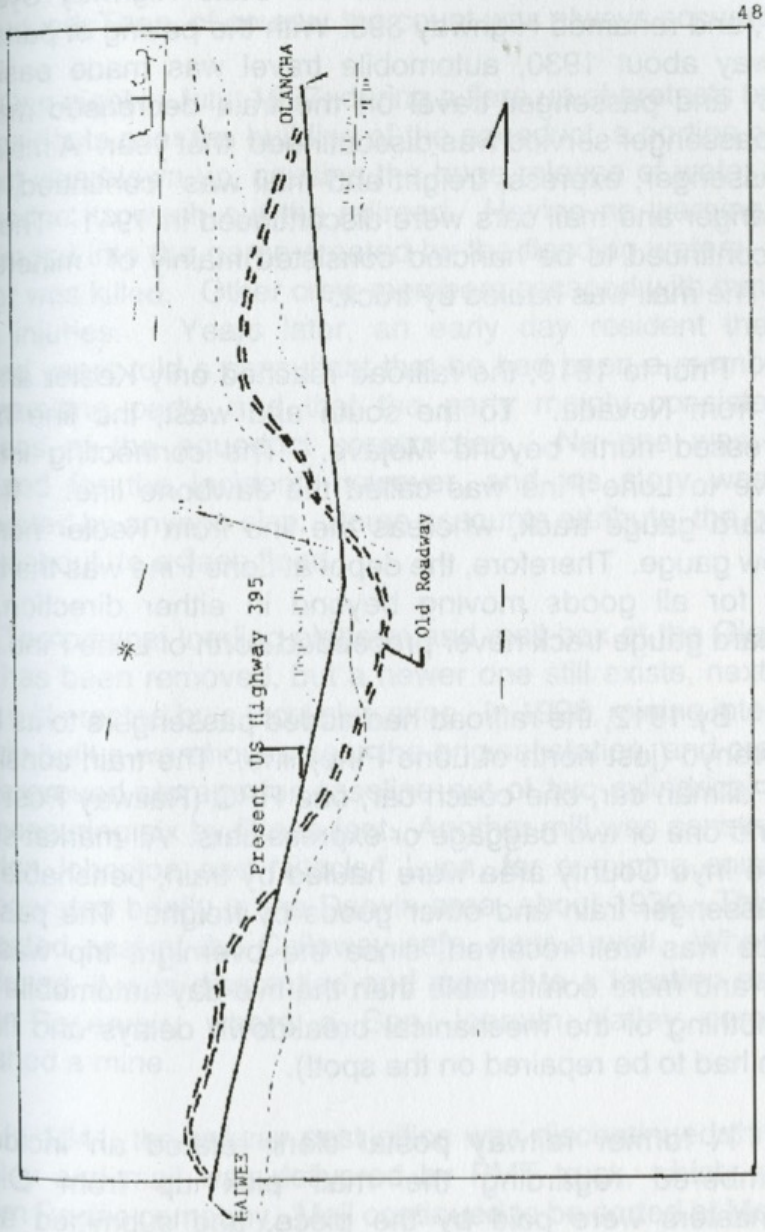
Remnants of another station can be seen near the southeast corner of Owens Lake, where it furnished relief teams between the Cerro Gordo Mines and Olancha. Traces of another station between Olancha and Darwin still exist, but the location lies within the China Lake Naval Station range and is not open to the public.

Except for Butler's smaller enterprise, William Walker's freight station and combined post office and store remained the only business in Olancha until the 1920s. Supplies and goods were still transported in by stage until the railroad was completed in 1910.

This railroad, built to accommodate movement of supplies for the Los Angeles aqueduct which was being constructed in the valley, also hauled passengers and freight. The trains consisted of one mail car, two passenger cars and three freight cars. The railroad was affording faster and more comfortable travel for people. It could haul the ore from the mines, which had decreased production, and accommodate freight and goods. Since there were no stations or depots in small towns, the stage was still the connecting transport to final destinations. The automobile had not yet made an impact on the area, because of lack of good roads and scarcity of gasoline, or "filling" stations. Tom Lacey related how he drove the first Ford automobile from Los Angeles to Bishop, breaking down numerous times, and using a full second set of tires. The trip took seven days, and was fraught with mishaps. This was prior to 1920, the exact date unavailable.

The Olancha station served travelers until the railroad provided faster and more comfortable travel. Thereafter, this form of travel diminished but regular schedules of freight teams and passenger travel existed until 1908, when the Nevada and California Railroad began construction of a standard gauge line from Mojave into Owens Valley to accommodate the movement of materials for the Los Angeles Aqueduct. By 1910, when the line was completed, Southern Pacific Railroad had assumed operation of the line. Passenger cars were added, enabling a more comfortable ride to and from the valley. Stages were still used to transfer passengers from the railroad depot to outlying towns not having a station.

The stage trail had been realigned with the building of the power plant and reservoir at Haiwee Meadows. It was formerly called the Three Flags Trail, named by a group who operated the Owens River Stage Lines in the early 1870s. The line had both carriages and freight wagons. The latter hauled supplies into the valley towns and ore and bullion back to Southern California for processing. With the construction of the reservoir, the Haiwee Springs stage station was inundated, and the trail was routed west of the original between what is now Dunmovin and Olancha.



Map 4. Old Road and Present Highway

Old road and present Highway

The road was taken into the State Highway System in 1927, and renamed Highway 395. With the paving of parts of the highway about 1930, automobile travel was made easier and faster, and passenger travel on the train decreased markedly. The passenger service was discontinued that year. A mixed train of passenger, express, freight and mail was continued, but the passenger and mail cars were discontinued in 1941. The freight that continued to be handled consisted mainly of minerals and ore. The mail was hauled by truck.

Prior to 1910, the railroad reached only Keeler and Lone Pine from Nevada. To the south and west, the line had not progressed north beyond Mojave. The connecting line from Mojave to Lone Pine was called the Jawbone line. It was a standard gauge track, whereas the line from Keeler north was narrow gauge. Therefore, the depot at Lone Pine was the transfer point for all goods moving beyond in either direction. The standard gauge track never proceeded north of Lone Pine.

By 1912, the railroad had added passengers to its Mojave to Owenyo (just north of Lone Pine) line. The train consisted of one Pullman car, one coach car, one RPO (Railway Post Office) car and one or two baggage or express cars. All market supplies for the Inyo County area were hauled by train, perishable goods by passenger train and other goods by freight. The passenger service was well received, since the overnight trip was much faster and more comfortable than the five-day automobile trip (to say nothing of the mechanical breakdown delays and flat tires which had to be repaired on the spot!).

A former railway postal clerk related an incident he remembered regarding the mail pick up from Olancha. Postmasters were paid by the piece, and submitted a count monthly to the postal department. Occasionally, people would bring mail after the pouch had been delivered to the railroad platform lockbox, and simply lay the letters on the box. The brakeman would gather these loose letters, and let the postmaster know how many pieces he had picked up. Periodically, a postal inspector asked the railroad clerk to check the mail count for accuracy to assure that the postmaster was not padding his account. Knowing the honesty of both the brakeman and

postmaster, the clerk saw to it that they both knew they were being audited. Then, of course, the count was always accurate.

One night in July, 1927, during a flare up of protests by the valley residents over the building of the aqueduct, a portion of the aqueduct was blown up, causing the huge release of water from the aqueduct to wash out the railroad. Having no warning, the train plunged into the gorge created by the flooding waters. The engineer was killed. Other crew members escaped with minor to serious injuries. Years later, an early day resident then in advanced years told a consultant that he had been a member of the dynamiting party, and that the party mainly consisted of employees of the aqueduct construction. No one was ever prosecuted for the incident, however, and his story was not corroborated by anyone else. Some accounts attribute the cause of the washout to a flash flood.

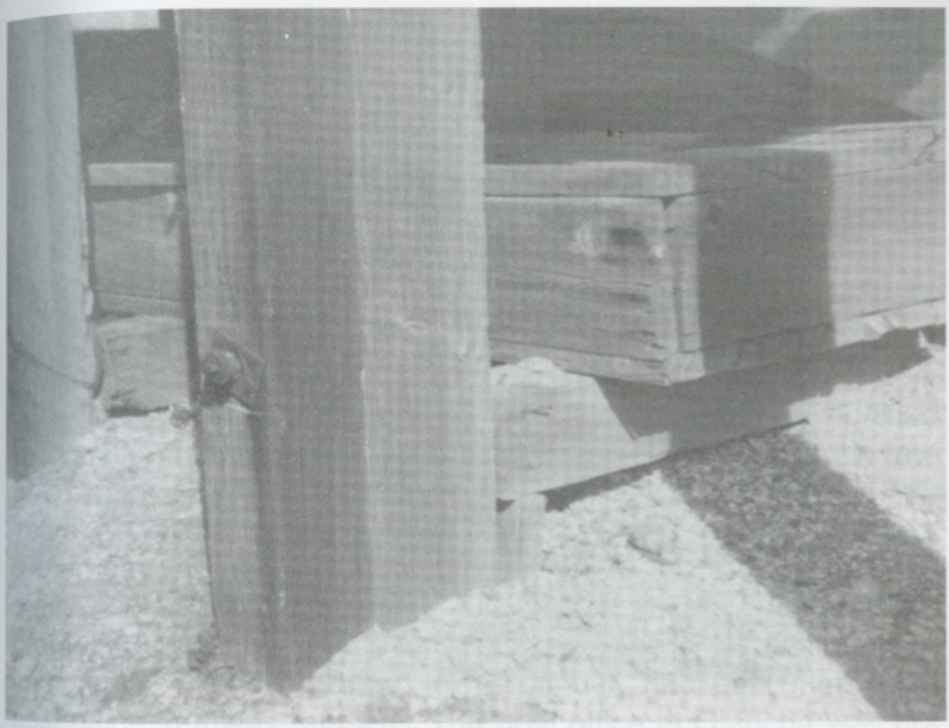
The original loading platform and mail box at the Olancha station has been removed, but a newer one still exists, next to a loading mill erected by a local clay mine. In 1928, mining interests at Darwin built a warehouse near the original station, and created an underground storage for gasoline out of two cylindrical steel tanks measuring six by fifteen feet. Another mill was constructed by Taylor Johnston and "Blacky" Lynn, for a mining company which operated briefly in the Darwin area, about 1930. This mill was located east of the Calloway cafe, near a well. When the mine closed, it was dismantled and moved to a location east of Haiwee Reservoir, where a San Joaquin Valley company established a mine.

In 1941, the railway post office was discontinued through the valley and mail was delivered by PMT truck, which was a Southern Pacific company. Mail continued to be sorted at Mojave. The rail service through the valley was discontinued and by the early 1980s, most of the tracks had been removed.

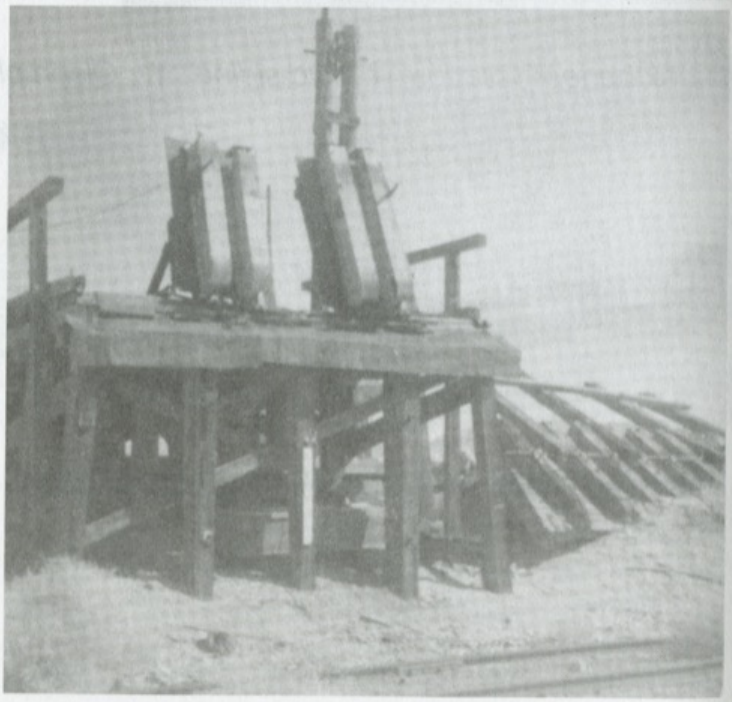
A booklet published by Southern Pacific Railroad and Sunset House in 1910, aimed at "homeseekers", extolled the fertile land and many crops raised in the valley, and the golden opportunities which awaited the homebuyer. Olancha was, however, given one line, a reference to a stage connection to the

area. Most of the booklet described the agricultural lands north of Lone Pine. A copy of this booklet was donated to the museum in Independence a few years ago by the author.

Mill built by Taylor Johnston. T. Johnston photo



Lockbox beneath platform on old siding. W. Olson photo



Remains of old railroad siding at Olancha W. Olson photo

CHAPTER SIX

POST OFFICES

The establishment of a post office in a community signified recognition that the town had sufficient stability to survive the fate of so many towns in the mining districts which lasted but a few years when the mines played out. Within the first decade of settlement, enough residents and mining people had established their homes at Olancha that the United States Government granted a petition for a post office. During his tenure in the community, Minnard Farley, town founder, had petitioned for a post office, but was refused. The post office at Olancha was not established until 1870, five years after Farley's departure.

Five post offices were established in 1870 in Inyo County: Bishop Creek, Little Lake, Lone Pine, Big Pine, and finally, Olancha on September 23, 1870. Prior to this, mail had been delivered by horseback from Lone Pine, for a time by Chris "Judge" Carrasco, after Inyo County was established. Earlier, as a part of Tulare County, Olancha received mail from Visalia, via the Walker Pass, also delivered by horseback.

The post office became the focal point of the community, even though it was for many years merely the corner of a room in the postmaster's home. Postmasters were paid by the number of pieces of mail dispatched. Since postoffices in the small communities were usually housed in the dwellings of the resident postmaster, as the office changed hands, the official address did also.

M. Allison Wheeler became the first postmaster of Olancha. A portion of a room in the house was used as the postoffice. A year later, on September 12, 1871, Thomas Passmore, son-in-law of William Walker, became postmaster.

Passmore was the first county clerk of Inyo County, and later, after he left Olancha, he became sheriff of Inyo County. He was shot to death in 1878 while attempting to arrest a lawbreaker in Lone Pine. During his tenure as postmaster of Olancha, the office was located in an adobe house which served as the freight station and store. This house stood on the ranch until 1967. A set of pigeon-hole boxes used during his term as postmaster is now located in the present day post office at Olancha. Through a succession of postmasters, the post office remained housed in the adobe building on the Walker ranch for over four decades and the office of postmaster was held by a member of that family.

William Walker succeeded Passmore as postmaster on January 28, 1875, and the postoffice continued to be housed at the same location. He remained postmaster until January 12, 1891, when his son, Webster H. Walker, became postmaster. Webster Walker held this post until June 1, 1912, when Martin P. Cuddahy was appointed postmaster, a position he held for just over a year.

At this time, mail was carried by train from Mojave, and the pouches dropped off at Olancha at the siding. On the return trip next day, the Railway Post Office would pick up outgoing mail. Prior to the siding and mail drop box, the mail pouches were exchanged by the rail clerk tossing off the incoming pouch and the postmaster tossing the outgoing pouch to him, eliminating the need for the train to stop if no other freight was involved. Later, a lockbox was built onto the railway platform, with keys held by both the postmaster and the railway postal clerk, which was used when the train ran at night.

On June 26, 1913, Charles T. Fitzhugh became postmaster, and for the first time, the office was moved from the Walker property. It was housed in his home, where he partitioned off a portion of a room which had an outside door for the office. His home was south and east of the present location. The local reference point is east of the former Castner garage, now the J&J Cafe. Martin Cuddahy, former postmaster, delivered the mail by stage to Keeler and Darwin during this time.

Max G. Sickman became postmaster on February 23,

1916, moving the office to his home. On November 3, 1917, William Pugsley became postmaster, and the postoffice was moved back to the Walker property in a little house just south of the Walker ranch house. Mr. Pugsley was injured in a railroad accident and had his legs amputated, so the actual duties of postmaster were performed by his wife, although he continued to hold the title.

Mrs. Annie G. Bibbey became the first woman postmaster on October 12, 1923. The post office was housed in a building erected by William Butler, who was a County Supervisor representing the Olancha district and southern Inyo County. He owned and operated tourist cabins on property west of the highway and north of the George Brown ranch. In 1923, he donated land for a building for the postoffice and residence of the postmaster. This was the first building erected for the purpose of housing the postoffice. It was located west of the highway about a block, just to the north of the Brown Ranch.

Butler was a Star Route driver, and delivered the mail daily from Olancha to Darwin, thirty miles east and south. The road was described as being two ruts, and during windy weather, was challenging to traverse when the ruts became filled with soda ash blowing from the lake to the north, and sand from the sand dunes to the south. The trip took all day, and when he became mired down, he was frequently helped out by miners and workers in the area. Taylor Johnston, in correspondence, mentions his partner and himself pulling Butler's car out of the sand on several occasions.

Mrs. Bibbey and her husband, Jacob, established a small grocery store in conjunction with the post office in 1924. Both the Bibbeys and their three daughters worked in the grocery store and postoffice, and one daughter recalls dispensing stamps as a young girl, even though it probably was not proper for a child to do so, in the eyes of the postal department. In 1926, Bibbey added a "filling station" and garage next to the post office. Thereafter, as one of the daughters wrote, the girls both "licked stamps and pumped gas".

After Annie Bibbey's death in 1930, Jacob Bibbey was

named postmaster, a position he held until 1943. In 1930, he built a new store building south of the Barber's Cafe on the highway, partitioning off a portion of the grocery store for the post office, and added a service station and garage.

When Mr. Bibbey retired, Jay Saner became postmaster on August 3, 1943. Saner had purchased the Rancho Olancha motel from Butler about 1938. The postoffice remained in the grocery store building until a fire in November of 1946 destroyed the postoffice, store, service station, garage and Bibbey's house, which was the location of the former post office.

On November 7, 1946, Alberta B. Hiter, daughter of Jacob and Annie Bibbey, was appointed postmaster. After the fire, the postoffice was housed temporarily in a small building behind the Ranch House Cafe adjacent to the location of the garage and service station. Mr. Bibbey purchased a Quonset hut and erected it just north of the cafe on land leased from Mark Lacey, where the post office was located in a front portion of the building, and an apartment in the rear where he resided. Mrs. Hiter operated a bookkeeping business and notary public service in a small office at the rear of the postoffice.

Wilma Fouch was appointed postmaster on July 31, 1950. She and her family lived in the apartment in the rear of the postoffice. In 1952, the method of mail delivery was again changed, with the institution of the Highway Post Office, at which time the mail was carried on a bus, and a postal clerk sorted the mail enroute. At the inauguration of the HPO, a bus load of dignitaries accompanied the inaugural run, along with the railway postal clerk, James Cooper, who had designed the plan. Mr. Cooper carried on the trek an old bell he had acquired from his days on the railroad, which he rang at each post office along the route. A picture of the officials, clerk, postmaster Fouch and her husband is in the Eastern Sierra Museum at Independence.

On March 8, 1956, Irene Carstensen was appointed postmaster. In 1964, the post office was upgraded to a class 3 designation, and new equipment and boxes were provided. The office remained in the Quonset hut until 1970, when it was moved to a new building owned and built by George and Helen DuFault

on the east side of the highway south of the main business section of Olancha. It represents the first building used exclusively for the postal service. This same year marked the centennial observation of the establishment of the postoffice in Olancha, and Mrs. Carstensen compiled a history of the office for the celebration. She retired in 1978.

Pat Benbrook of Cartago was postmaster from 1978 until 1985. She had previously served as postmaster at Cartago. Dorothy Stine of rural Olancha succeeded her until March of 1992, when Ron Scandrett became postmaster for nine months. Judy Peak became postmaster in December of 1992, and transferred to the Independence office in 1996. Lorraine Avitia is presently the postmaster. With a change in regulations in selecting postmasters, the three last postmasters were not required to be residents of the area served by the post office, as was the case in earlier years.

From left, Albert, Nellie and Virginia Fitzhugh on steps of unfinished house about 1912. The door on the right was later used as postoffice entry. V. Lemon photo

Post office and store Bibbey operated, about 1925. P. Laune Photo

Store and postoffice Bibbey built on highway, east of location of former postoffice, about 1928. P. Laune Photo

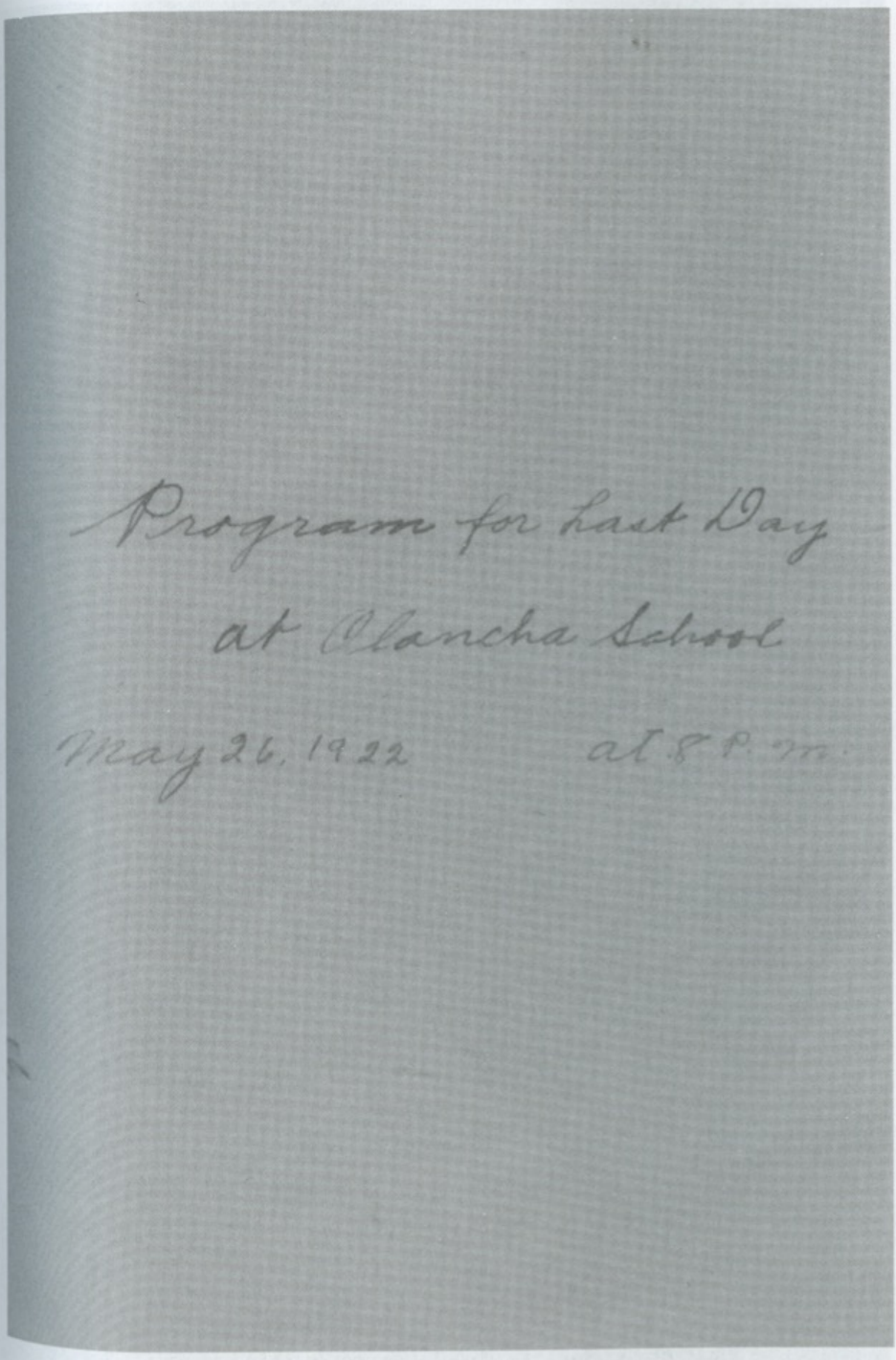
Post office in Quonset Hut I. Carstensen Photo

Clara Dodge, left, and Irene Carstensen at front of postoffice at centennial celebration. I. Carstensen Photo

Present post office. W. Olson Photo

C. T. Fitzhugh, postmaster, wife Nellie and children Albert and Virginia, 1907. V. Lemon Photo

Some early postmasters, about 1917: Back row, Mr. Pugsley, Nellie Fitzhugh, Mrs. Darling, unknown, Virginia and Albert Fitzhugh. Center, Ivan Darling, Front right, Mrs. Pugsley. V. Lemon Photo


Program for last Day
at Olancha School
May 26, 1922 at 8 P. M.

1. A Drill — Jerry And girls

2 The Polite Boy — Albert George

3 On the Desert — Mrs Butler

4. Fraidie Cat — Leslie Cooper

5 Music

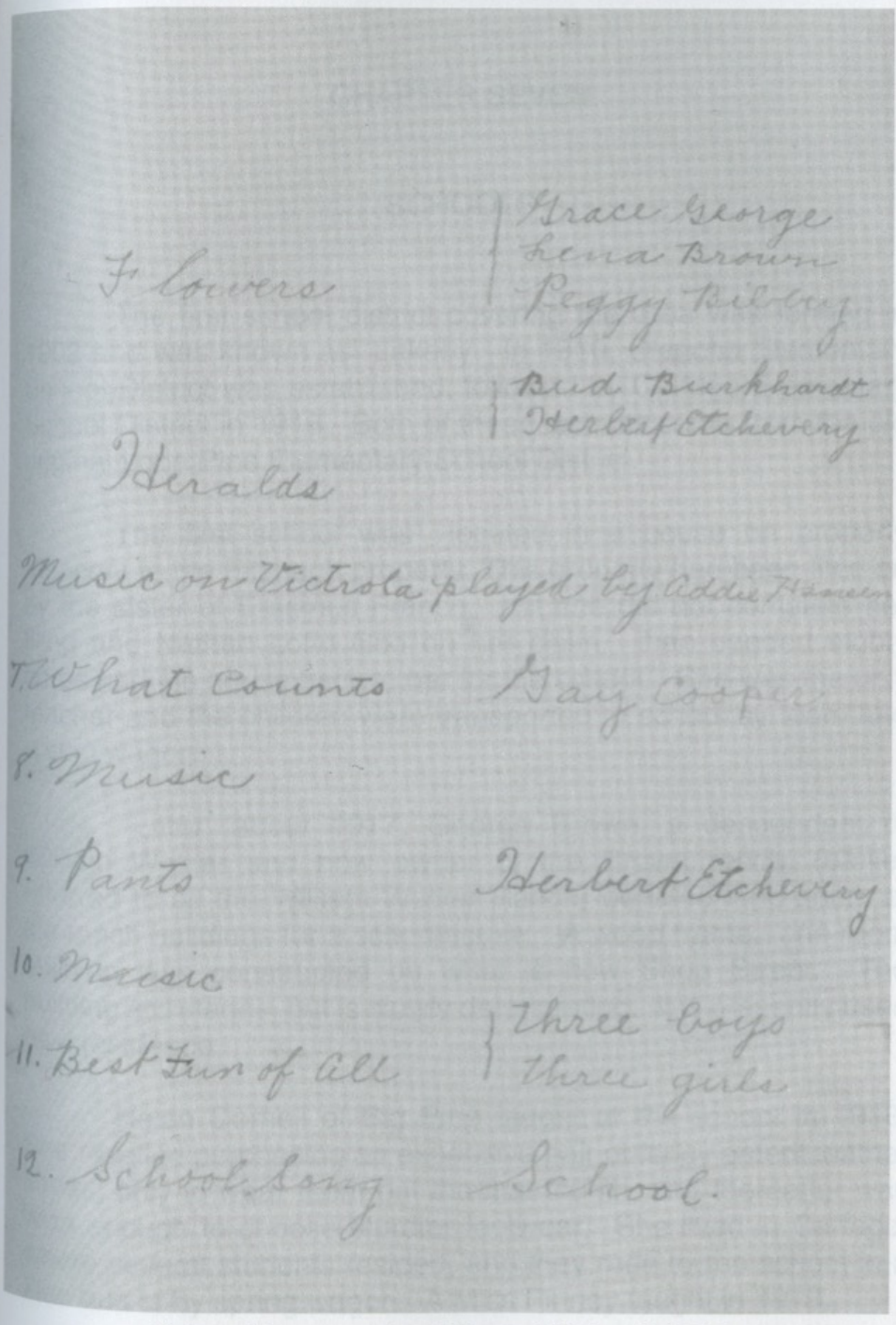
6 Coming of May

Queen — Bertie Bibbey

Spirit of Spring — Gay Cooper

Fairies — Leslie cooper
Claire Bibbey
Mercy Spies

Elves — albert George
Buddy cooper
Jerry Brown



School Program, Last Day of School, 1918

CHAPTER SEVEN

SCHOOLS

The first school district covering the area was formed in 1902 and was known as Lakeby. In 1910, Olancha Elementary School District was established, followed by Cartago Elementary School District in 1918. Both of these districts came from the old original Lone Pine Elementary School District.

The first school was located in a house on property adjacent to the Fitzhugh property. This property had been filed on by the sister of Erasmus French, but she did not complete her filing and Nathan Lotto filed on her claim, then deeded eighty acres and the house back to her for the school. She was the only teacher and the children were transported to school by team and spring wagon.

Later, about 1917, George Brown, a descendant of William Walker and now owner of the Brown ranch, (earlier referred to as the William Walker Ranch) donated land south of the ranch buildings for a schoolhouse. A wood frame, one room building was constructed on what is now Shop Street. The building still stands, but is slowly deteriorating. It is presently used as a residence.

Helen Cornell of Big Pine taught at the school in 1918. She recalled purchasing an expensive pair of fancy patent leather shoes, only to wear them out the first month, and thereafter was wise enough to choose sturdier footwear. She lived in Cartago, where several students resided, and they rode to the school in a Reo bus or by spring wagon. A Miss Pinney taught in 1919.

Another early teacher, Clara Towler, first started teaching in 1920, with three students. In a short while, children came from

Darwin and Haiwee Reservoir, providing enough students to justify maintenance of the school. One of the Darwin students she mentioned was Addie Hanson, whose children later lived and worked in the Olancha area. Mrs. Towler wrote of one other incident when she was teaching there. One of her small students accidentally swallowed a safety pin and died. She wrote of how saddened the children were, and how Mrs. Butler had brought flowers to lay on the child's desk. The mother was so distraught that she packed all of her daughter's belongings in a trunk and locked it, and the trunk was not opened until after her death.

Mrs. Towler taught there intermittently for some dozen years, and her last year, saw the student population grow to over thirty students. During this time, her husband took the older students each year to Independence to visit the Court House and library. It was an all day outing, and tiring, but she states the children enjoyed it. Later, Elizabeth Lacey, wife of Mark Lacey, taught in the one-room school, as did her sister, Dorothy Baker, and Clara Castner, wife of Arlo "Jack" Castner, who owned a service station and garage at the south edge of the town.

These teachers managed grades kindergarten through eighth grades in one room, and provided a solid basic education so that the students were well equipped to enter high school. The high school students were bused to Lone Pine High School from Olancha and other southern Inyo locations.

Jacob Bibbey was the school bus driver, and transported students from Cartago, Little Lake and Darwin to the early school. The first bus was a 1918 Reo, which was used in fair weather, being replaced by a team of horses hitched to a spring wagon in inclement weather. This made a long ride over rough roads, but one teacher remarked on the close relationship they developed during the long and tiresome rides.

Olancha Union Elementary District was formed in 1945 by the consolidation of the Olancha and Cartago school districts. Students from both areas attended classes in the little red schoolhouse until 1949, when Brown donated an acre south of the original site, and regained the original land donated, for a new school. The new school is constructed of pumice brick, and

currently serves kindergarten through sixth grade students. A bus now transports students from the areas south of Olancha to the school, and secondary students are bused to Lone Pine schools.

First school building, about 1917 A. Brown photo

Original school presently. W. Olson photo

1918 school students, only identified students are Myrtle Carey and Cathryn Gordon. H. Cornell photo

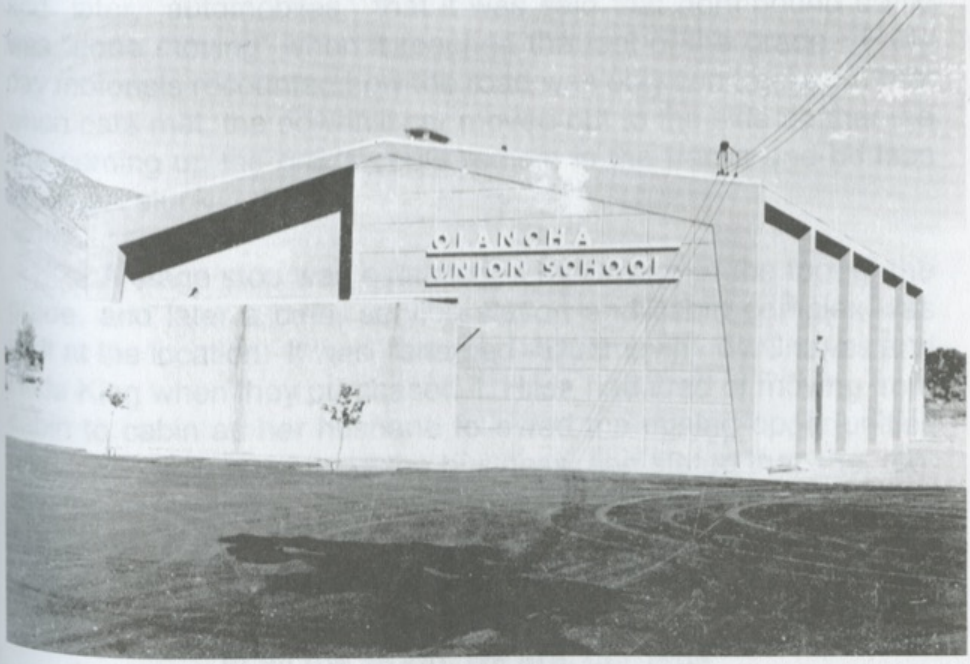
Mrs. Towler and students, 1920: students: Albert and Grace George, Bud Burkhart, Alberta Bibbey, Addie Hanson, Albert Fitzhugh and Aldy Brown. H. Cornell photo

Warren Ramsey's birthday party, 1918, Helen Cornell teacher. Students: Kathryn Gordon, Myrtle Carey and Warren Ramsey. H. Cornell photo

MayDay party, 1920 C. Towler teacher. H. Cornell photo

Jacob Bibbey and 1918 Reo "Jitney" bus, first schoolbus and driver. P. Laune photo

School bus, 1918. I. Carstensen photo



Present school at Olancha. W. Olson photo

CHAPTER EIGHT

POST 1920 DEVELOPMENT

Significant changes occurred in the townsite during the twenties and thirties. Roads had been improved, and in 1931 a section of the highway from about seven miles south of Olancha to Coso Junction was paved, the first paved road north of Mojave. John Storm, a long time resident of Sage Flats south of Olancha, and well known in the community, worked on the grading and paving of this section, which was referred to as the Cowan Grade, a particularly sandy hill which was difficult to traverse. The grade was so infamous for its toll on freight teams, and later, automobiles, that it was said that northbound traffic was "done moving" when it reached the foot of the grade. Early day motorists recounted how the road was only two tracks, so that when cars met, the downhill car moved out to the side so that the one coming up the grade could remain in the tracks and be less apt to get stuck.

A stage stop was established by Cowan at the foot of the grade, and later a cafe, service station and cabin complex was built at the location. It was renamed "Dunmovin" by Charles and Hilda King when they purchased it. Hilda had tired of moving from cabin to cabin as her husband followed the mining opportunities and, when they purchased the business, she stated that she, too, was "done moving".

We've moved from Yon to Hither
Now we're set and provin
In all the world, we are, perhaps
The only folks, DUNMOVIN
Olancha Journal c.1940

The road improvements, especially after it was

incorporated into the state highway system in 1927, progressed rapidly. Some of the road was re-aligned from the freight wagon trails to adjust to both travel needs and the changing residential pattern of the community. The original road through the town followed the trail used by the freight wagons. South of town, it had angled southeast to the way station which was located at Haiwee Meadows, now Haiwee Reservoir. Through town, the road was west of the present location, following what is now Cantlay Road south of the business section, then along what is now Shop Street, and north just west of the present highway through the town. A regular Sunday recreation was horseracing on this road from the Brown ranch to the Lacey ranch. Cottonwood trees line the old road through the town, grown from seeds blown from the original trees into the ditch alongside the road.

As automobiles replaced teams, the old way stations became tourist cabins. The corrals and stables were replaced with service stations and garages. Cafes replaced the boarding houses run in conjunction with the freight stations. Pack stations sprang up in the foothills near the town, and sportsmen from urban areas were packed by mule and horseback into the mountains for fishing and hunting expeditions.

In former years, the water flow in Olancha Creek was sufficient to support fish populations. It was stocked in the spring with rainbow trout by the Department of Fish and Game. Knowledgeable residents, however, trekked to the upper waters, above the location where the creek ran underground, and fished for the scrappy native fish, a cross of rainbow and golden trout.

Travel was heavier in spring and summer as people from the metropolitan areas of Southern California flocked to the northern Owens Valley and Mono County for fishing and camping. It remains a time of heavy traffic along the highway.

Fall brought deer and water fowl hunters, both for the Olancha area and the northern Inyo and Mono County areas. Depending on the weather, it was the start of the skiing season in the Mammoth Lakes area of Mono County. It was also the beginning of the seasonal travel to Death Valley, east of Olancha via Highway 190.

Truck traffic increased as freight was transported by road more than by rail. The highway became the connecting line between Nevada and points east, and the populous Los Angeles basin. Today, truck traffic is heavy throughout the year. A bus company established a route through the valley, and Olancha became a rest stop. Greyhound Lines still provides bus passenger service in the area.

The increased automobile travel gave rise to tourist-oriented service industries. Motels, garages, service stations, restaurants and pack stations provided service to the traveling public as well as the residents, and became a source of employment for those wishing to locate in the town.

The origins of the people who established residences and businesses during this period were as varied as the reasons for coming and settling. A few were Native Americans, two Yaquis from Porterville who lived west and south of Olancha and worked on a local ranch; others were Shoshoni and Paiute, mostly living on the ranches of their employers. Some were miners seeking work, others were nomadic migrants seeking relief from the Great Depression of the thirties. Some of these immigrants were employees of outside institutions stationed for a time in the area, and who decided to move there permanently. Itinerant men, out of work, sought employment on the ranches, in the nearby mines, or in service stations and restaurants

Although the population was predominantly Euro-American, some Mexican families resided in the area, mostly miners, with farming as a subsistence occupation. Several had secured land grants and others homesteaded property and built in or near the town. Only two large ranches were operated as cattle ranches. Smaller ranches and farms were operated south and east of the town. One was used as a wintering ranch for a sheep rancher from San Joaquin Valley.

Restaurant employees were often hired seasonally through employment agencies in Los Angeles, who placed those workers unable to obtain work in the city. Using this distant source was necessary since the community did not have a ready labor supply, and residents of other valley towns were reluctant to

move to this smaller, more isolated community.

Some of those immigrants had never seen the area before, and stayed less than a pay period. Others welcomed the slower pace and tranquillity of the rural area, and remained. Some came for the fishing and hunting opportunities nearby and put down roots. Some came to escape from the bustling city, their families, and sometimes, the law.

There were the erstwhile relatives of established residents, the local "town drunks", the disabled and the eccentrics. All were assimilated into the community, working at various occupations as abilities and need dictated.

Part-time prospectors made Olancha their headquarters, living in whatever shack or shed was available. One of these grizzled prospectors, Charlie Anderson, carried with him on his many travels a complete set of Shakespeare, and volumes of the Greek philosophers. His conversation was often peppered with quotes from these tomes. George Townsend, another prospector turned cafe worker, carried with him his family Bible, with the family history recorded. On occasion, he would ask the postmaster to keep the Bible for him, as he feared he might lose it on one of his periodic "benders". Another frequent imbiber worked part time as a cowboy, and when the cattle drive into the mountains started, he could be seen with the reins in his teeth, waving a bottle in each hand, as he headed up the trail. A disabled man was employed as a general hand by a cafe owner, and although his abilities were limited to cleaning and stocking, he was a permanent part of the establishment.

One long-time resident, who was highly respected, confided to a consultant shortly before his death that he had never married, applied for a driver's license or Social Security Number, registered to vote or took any other action which would draw the attention of the government toward him or require that he prove identity or citizenship. He related that he never drank for fear of getting "a loose tongue". Aside from his admitted unorthodox entry into the country, his reasons for taking such extreme evasive measures remain a mystery, although the consultant said he alluded to a serious offense in his home country. He related that

he had stowed away on a ship, jumped overboard with his belongings the night before they were to enter Ellis Island, and swam to shore, where he was hidden in a warehouse by fellow countrymen until they obtained identification papers for him. He said he worked on the docks until he had paid the countrymen for his papers and support, and then headed west, finally settling in Olancha, where he had been hired to do work. Finding steady employment, he remained there, feeling the quiet rural life afforded a safe haven far from immigration officials.

At least two ladies who had previously worked in vaudeville, on the stage, and in movies, as singers and dancers, arrived via the employment agency, found husbands, and settled in as long-time residents. More than one itinerant man found menial employment, married the boss' s daughter and became owner of the business.

Employers of these imported workers often furnished room and board for them, although the room was often an abandoned one-room tourist cabin, with a communal shower and bathroom. Employers routinely furnished transportation to nearby towns, and treated the employee as extended family, yet maintained their respective status roles. This hacienda custom has largely disappeared as more housing, and therefore, more employable residents, populate the town, and transportation from other towns has become easier.

Native Americans

Lifelong residents, Con Zuniga, a Yaqui-Mexican, and his sister, Carmen, lived with their father in Sage Flats. After selling his property to John and Claire Storm, Mr. Zuniga and Con moved to a house at the Oaks, where they resided with Otto Raske, a miner. Con worked on local ranches and was well known. Con could speak five languages, and served with distinction in World War II. His father would occasionally get angry with Con and move out, walking to the northern edge of Haiwee reservoir, where he would build a shelter. He would remain there until Con could persuade him to move back, usually in three or four weeks. This was a recurring pattern.

Silas Ness, a Shoshoni, was born in Saline Valley, and was raised in Darwin by his mother, Rose Nobles. He worked in the Olancha area all his adult life. For many years, he worked for the county road department. He and his wife, Frances, and two daughters resided in a house he built on School Street. One daughter was elected Rodeo Queen of the Lone Pine Rodeo when she was a senior in high school. Shortly after, she lost her life in an automobile accident, a tragedy which affected the entire community. The other daughter married and moved to southern California. After his retirement, he and his wife moved to the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshoni reservation.

The Hanson brothers, Duggan, Ivan, Logan and Leland, resided in or near Olancha for many years. They were Shoshoni natives of Darwin, and employed on local ranches. Their mother, Addie, attended school in Olancha. Their grandfather, George Hanson, related to them how he had, as a small child, observed the Bennett party in Death Valley from Telescope Peak. He said it was the first white people they had seen, and they were frightened of them, so did not approach them to point out the springs which were close by, and which the immigrants had despaired of finding. All of the brothers moved from the area.

Other Residents

Early resident Barney Sears came from Arizona to Olancha and filed on land north of the Agustus Walker ranch in 1916. He had worked for A. W. Cline in Arizona. Cline was the father of Claire "Stormy" Storm, of Sage Flats. Barney established a pack station and transported sportsmen into the mountains and Golden Trout Camp for hunting and fishing. He had a cabin, corrals, well and a windmill on his Olancha acreage, and used Cottonwood Canyon, about seven miles north of Olancha, as his base of operations. His business endured for over fifty years. One of the legends surrounding this man concerned his considerable strength. A stubborn burro was not behaving as Barney thought he should, so he hit him in the head with his fist and knocked the burro unconscious. Thereafter, the burro behaved quite well.

A giant of a man, with a girth to match his height, he sported a ten gallon Stetson and usually had a pipe with a curved stem in his mouth. Despite his size, he was accomplished on the dance floor and popular with the ladies. His gallant and courtly manner towards the ladies extended from the dance floor to offering a helping hand, literally, to boost the ladies into the saddle if they had difficulty mounting the horse on pack trips. (And sometimes, even if they didn't need help!)

"SEE THE SIERRAS WITH SEARS"
Guarantee fish - Git you a buck
(That is, of course, if you have any luck) -
Don't mind the money - I'll meet you half-way.
Can you put a price on REAL JOY by the day?
ASK BARNEY
Ed. Note to THE LADIES: He's the handsomest Packer in all these here parts. Olancha Journal c. 1940

After Barney's death, a long-time employee, Leo Rogers, and his wife Merta operated the pack station. Merta sometimes stayed at a cabin in the mountains to cook for the groups Leo had packed in. On one occasion, she related the time when she looked across the meadow and saw a bear on the other side of the stream. Grabbing her dishpan and a metal ladle, she ran out and commenced pounding them together. This racket had proven reliable in discouraging the bears from approaching on other occasions, but apparently this bear was either very hungry or a music lover, she opined, as he cocked his head sideways and looked at her for a few minutes, then waded into the stream and approached closer. Still banging the pan, Merta retreated into the cabin to get a gun. Fortunately, a cowboy from a neighboring cabin rode up just then, fired his pistol in the air, and the bear retreated. It was good timing, Merta said, as she realized when she got into the cabin that she did not have a gun!

Originally from Oklahoma, Leo was part Choctaw. In his younger days, he had performed in the Will Rogers Wild West Show as a trick rider. After their retirement, they lived in Cartago. The pack station was discontinued, as air travel into dirt airstrips in the mountain meadows and, more recently, roads into the mountain meadows, diminished the pack station enterprise. Leo

wintered his pack burros and horses in the Cosos, near Little Cactus Flats and Centennial. Young men and budding cowboys would help him on these rides, along with a seasoned cowboy to offer guidance.

Irwin "Buster" Viers came from Oklahoma and Arizona to work for Barney, and as a cowboy on local ranches. He later worked for many years for the County Road Department. He bought Barney's place, and built a pumice stone house to replace the cabin. He lived there until after his retirement when he moved to Arizona. His first wife, Marjorie, was an accomplished artist, and did many paintings of the local scenery, as well as whimsical cartoon postcards. He later married a co-owner of the Ranch House Cafe.

Earl "Pappy" Holloway and his family moved onto the George property east of the Cuddahy ranch, and fronting on State Route 190, about 1937. He worked for National Soda Products at Keeler. Earl and Agnes' daughter, Irma, married Jim Cline, brother of Ada Cline Brown, and they resided in a house on the Brown ranch. She resides in Cartago. Their son, Elwyn, helped to break horses and worked as a cowboy during his teens, and later worked for the California Division of Highways, now CalTrans, and moved from the area.

Walter Stine owned property near the Bibbey ranch in the 1930s and 1940s. His brother has adjoining land, and has been a long time resident there.

Earl "Red" Lester came to Olancha in the late thirties. A former "traveling salesman", he had suffered injuries in the earthquake in Long Beach in 1934, and relocated to Olancha for health reasons. He worked variously as bartender, service station attendant, and sometimes wrangler for Barney Sears and Leo Rogers. He was known as the wit of the community, with a joke for every occasion. Some of the jokes were localized, such as his answer to a tourist asking if "the wind blows this way all the time?" Red's answer: "No, sometimes it blows the other way." And on calm days he would claim that it used to be very windy until a rancher put in a windmill and took all the wind. At their best, the jokes were entertaining; at worst, a diversion. But always, he could be depended on for a bit of country humor. He later

managed the "tower" service station east of the highway at the Ranch House Cafe until he retired and moved with his wife, Marjorie, to southern California.

Don Tysinger and his wife, Alene, came to Olancha about 1944, and built a home west of the Saner motel. Don was a cook, and worked at the various restaurants until his death. He was a Navy veteran, and was on duty on the Arizona on the morning of December 7, 1941. He was one of only two hundred eighteen survivors of the more than two thousand Navy personnel aboard the ship that morning. He was reluctant to talk of his experiences, but did on one occasion describe the scene. He had been on duty in the officers' galley at the time. This was a floor below the area which received a direct hit. Although he recovered from his physical wounds, the emotional scars lasted his lifetime.

Don relished telling how, shortly after the attack, his wife was persuaded by officials to convince the native population to evacuate to the mountains by the promise of a case of gin awaiting her at the top of the mountain. As he told it, she had every person on the island on top of that mountain in short order, and the promised payment was awaiting her. As a young woman, Alene had performed as trick rider with various "wild west" shows and at rodeos.

Salty Peters was a cowboy who worked for various ranches and pack stations in the Olancha and Lone Pine area. He was known as an honest person, loyal to friends and disdainful of those he considered of poor character. His favorite term was "bawstard", used both as compliment and curse. Stories abound of Salty's independence and disregard of protocol.

His good character aside, Salty did not fare well in his romantic life. Once, when he came out of the mountains, and his girl friend did not meet him as arranged, he asked for a ride to town to see if she was all right. The boss said no, there was work to be done. "Then I'll walk", announced Salty, and, shouldering his saddle, off he marched the seven or so miles to town, only to find another had stolen his girl friend's affections. At another time, when Salty's dog ended up at a residence some distance away, the people offered to bring him back. "Nope," said Salty, " a dog's just like a woman. Once they start chasin' they ain't worth a

damn." Salty's real name was Fred Eubanks, but few people knew it.

Business Enterprises

JOHN CALLOWAY, HONORARY MAYOR OF OLANCHA
Olancha Journal c.1940

John Calloway purchased the Cuddahy property on the east side of the highway across from the Brown ranch house and established a service station and boarding house about 1924. He pumped gas from fifty gallon barrels, and his wife served food on tables consisting of planks laid across empty fifty gallon barrels. He later constructed a restaurant, garage and service station on the east side of the highway, and an adobe motel and store building on the west side. Another long time resident, Taylor Johnston, helped construct the motel and a separate building to house a grocery store in 1929.

CALLOWAYS
GROCERIES AND MEATS Saddles, Boots, Bolts, Wire, Grain, Hay, Cheese, Crackers, Cosmetics, Horse Linament, Lumber, Laundry, Oh, Heck! General Merchandise - See us. Olancha Journal, c.1940

Whit Barber cooked for a time for Calloway, then leased a part of the building across the street and opened a competing cafe. After Barber erected a sign with an arrow pointing to his cafe, Calloway terminated the lease, and Barber then moved north to leased land adjacent to Bibbey's store and service station, and built a cafe, which he and his wife, Jessie, operated.

About 1938, Roy and Mary Adamson purchased the Calloway property and managed the cafe, service station, garage and motel/store buildings. Roy had previously worked in the valley for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. He and his wife, Mary, lived in a house just south of the motel which had been built by the City of Los Angeles for workers on the aqueduct. Mary's brother, Jesse, was a cowboy who worked on

the local ranches. He later moved to Lone Pine, and was constable there for a number of years.

OLANCHA CAFE
OLANCHA SERVICE STATION
Roy - ADAMSON - Mary
Day and Night Service
Good Food Fully Equipped Garage
And Friendly Service
Olancha Journal c.1940

The Adamsons obtained a liquor license and established a bar and small dance floor adjacent to the cafe. They operated the three businesses until the early 1950s. At various times, a grocery store, barber shop, and beauty salon were established in the store building. Employees lived in the old tourist cabins east of the cafe, and in the motel rooms.

Bob Brown operated the cafe after the Adamsons left in the early 1950s. He later moved the liquor license to Darwin, where he operated a bar and cafe for a number of years. After he left, the cafe went through several owners, and the building burned down in the 1960s. It has not been rebuilt. The store and motel buildings are slowly crumbling. A garage to replace the one razed to make way for the post office building was built in front of their location. The service station has been replaced. The old tourist cabins which stood east of the restaurant building were razed earlier. The old Cuddahy barn and corrals have collapsed, and lie just east of the post office building. The log which formed the ridgepole of the barn, and old wooden water troughs are still discernible.

During World War II, an airfield was established east of the cafe and south of State Route 190 on the Adamson property. The dirt field was used by the Civilian Pilots' Training to train civilians in aviation for defense purposes. The pilot training program was popular, and several residents, as well as a contingent of Hollywood stars and studio personnel, took flying lessons at the field. The students flew to Panamint Valley east of Olancha for their cross-country training, at first landing on the roadway. After

being chastised by the authorities for this practice, the group cleared sagebrush from a level area of desert east of Panamint Resort, outlined it with rocks, and attached a makeshift windsock to a pole for wind direction. Their efforts at clearing and outlining the field were good enough that it remains discernible. Some years ago, it was thought by some that it was the remnant of a Native American ball court. It is not used as a landing strip anymore.

After the program was discontinued, a few pilots used the field at Adamsons as a base from which they flew hunters and fishermen into the Sierra Nevada mountains west of Olancha, landing at Monache and Tunnel meadows. Shirl "Red" Fouch, Ed Roman, and Ernie Willie were some of the pilots utilizing the field. All were former Army pilot instructors, and after the program was discontinued, they made their homes in the area, working as mechanics, service station operators or at other available employment. The field was not used after the mid-fifties, as the town at Grant, three miles south, had a longer field unobstructed by power lines. The Adamson field, as it is designated on old maps, has since overgrown, and there is no indication that an airfield was ever there.

See these grouchy people
Tired out with weary miles
RANCHO OLANCHA- Presto,
Now they're wearin' smiles.
Olancha Journal c.1940

About 1938, Jay Saner purchased Butler's Rancho Olancha motel and managed it until 1946, when it was sold to a family from Los Angeles. It has not been in operation for a number of years, and is slowly deteriorating. During his ownership, Saner fed a covey of quail which would come at his calling and perch on his shoulder for their daily handout. Saner was also postmaster for a few years.

In 1930, Whit Barber leased land from the Lacey property about a quarter of a mile north of Calloway's and built a cafe on the west side of the highway. He called his cafe the Farm House

Cafe. He later changed it to the Ranch House Cafe, and the name has remained through a succession of owners, sometimes preceded by the current owner's name. He constructed a log cabin in the rear which was used as storage. It is still standing and in use. A small four room dormitory with outside shower and toilet was built beside the log cabin, and was used as living quarters for employees. It is currently occupied.

In 1936, Jacob Bibbey leased land adjacent to the cafe and built a store, service station and garage. A large, modern service station was built directly across the street, with a tower on top. Neon signs later adorned the tower. This building still stands, but is not in use. A service station has been installed just south of its location.

OLANCHA STORE AND POSTOFFICE
Groceries, Meats, Candy, Tobacco
FRIENDLY SERVICE
Olancha Journal c.1940

In 1938, Bibbey bought the cafe, and turned it over to his daughter, Alberta, and her husband, Dick Hiter. They obtained a liquor license and added a bar to one end of the building, and an apartment on the south end of the building.

DICK'S SERVICE
RICHIE'S FARMHOUSE CAFE
Union-Texaco-Associated-Economy
Fine Foods and Cocktails
Towing-Tires-Auto Club Service
Dick Hiter, Prop. Olancha, Calif.
Olancha Journal c.1940

The Hiters managed the cafe for a number of years, and it was sold in 1951. It has had a succession of owner/operators since, and the interior has undergone several remodelings. About 1946, Hiter had a pumice brick home built on property south and west of the cafe. At that time, he remodeled the cafe, taking the red cedar which had lined the clothes closet in the apartment to construct a handsome back bar from the cedar. The former

apartment was made into a bar, with booths and a dance floor in the central restaurant area. A counter was put in on the north addition where the old, little bar had been. There is no longer a bar, although the cafe has been in operation almost continuously since it was first opened. A mounted golden eagle has adorned the walls of the cafe since the 1930s. It is still there, along with numerous other game trophies added by subsequent owners.

This is the oldest building in the town which still houses the original business. It remains on leased land. The "tower" service station across the highway east has not operated for a number of years. The store, service station and garage of Bibbey's was never rebuilt after burning down in 1946. None of the Bibbey children reside in the town.

In 1947, a large Quonset hut was moved onto property east of the highway across from the burned garage and store. For a time, a garage was operated in the building, and then it became a grocery store, operated for a number of years by Gene Menesini. He also had a store in Darwin. He later moved to Nevada, and the store was managed by a succession of proprietors. It remains in operation as a grocery store, with a self-serve gas station just to the north. Living quarters were built in the upper story of the Quonset, but are not used as such presently.

In 1944, George DuFault moved from Los Angeles to Olancha and operated the Hiter garage. He and his family built a home west of the Butler motel. He operated a garage at various locations in the town until his retirement. After the fire burned the Hiter garage, he operated his business in the Quonset hut across the street east, then moved to the garage at the Adamson complex in the south end of town. Later, he built a garage building on what was the parking lot of Adamson's motel and store buildings. He built the Olancha postoffice on land he owned, and leased it to the government for an extended period.

He and his wife, Helen, remained in Olancha, but their two daughters moved to other areas after finishing high school in Lone Pine. One daughter owns property in the residential area of town. George's brother moved to Olancha in the late 60s and still resides in the town.

Jim McKenna was a native of Ireland and a former railroad worker and stone mason. He came to the Olancha area in the 1920s. He fashioned the stone work at Coso Hot Springs Resort, about fifteen miles south of Olancha. This was a resort built around the hot springs, and touted commercially as a health spa. It enjoyed prosperity for a dozen years or so, both by visiting patrons and the sale of Coso Mud, a product made of the clay around the hot springs, as a cure for ailments ranging from arthritis to aging, and as a beauty aid.

Mr. McKenna's work can also be seen at the Dunmovin resort, and in Olancha, among other places. He created the stone facing, porches and walks on both the Calloway and Barber cafes. The stone pillars on the arch at The Oaks were also his work. He was considered by many to be a master craftsman. He was a quiet man, courtly in manner, and somewhat of a loner. He had worked laying rails for the railway, and when he reached Los Angeles, he did stone mason work, which he had learned in his native land, and was hired to work at Coso Hot Springs. He remained living near Olancha until his death.

Chris Carstensen moved with his family from Los Angeles to Cartago, and managed the service station and garage there for a time, then moved to an acreage a few miles south of the present town limits, and operated the garage at Grant. Later, he built a motel on his property, called the Rustic Motel. His wife, Irene, was postmaster at Olancha for a number of years

Woody Raper managed the service station south of School Street, at what is now Fall Street, in the early 1950s. He and his family resided in a house just west of the service station.

In the 1950s, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Carrasco, member of a pioneer Lone Pine family, opened a cafe to the rear of the station. It was in operation for about ten years. The building no longer stands. The cafe served both American and Mexican food, but her specialty was Mexican food. It was a popular spot with the local residents.

Arlo "Jack" Castner moved to Olancha in the early 1940s and built a service station, garage and living quarters east of the

highway across from Williams station. It is remembered as the "Flying Horse" service station. His wife, Clara, taught in the Olancha and Cartago schools. As with many others, he had chosen to move to Olancha for the cleaner air, as he suffered from asthma. Today, the building houses a small cafe and a seasonal hobby and craft shop.

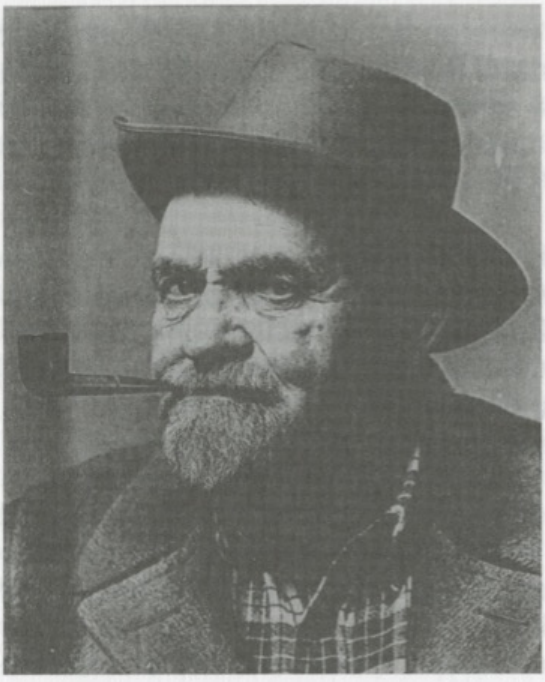
Bill Cantlay built a home on property west of the highway in 1930. He had a clay mine east of Olancha off the Keeler road, and operated it continuously. Cantlay Street is named for him, and identifies the road his home is situated on, although in a state of deterioration at this time. His wife, Ollie, was an avid rock collector and prospector, and spent much time out in the hills of the Cosos, alone in her jeep. One time when she did not return on schedule, Bill went looking for her and found her shoveling sand, attempting to upright the overturned jeep. Unhurt except for pride, she maintained she would have eventually righted the vehicle by herself, and no one would have known about her misadventure. As it was, Bill delighted in telling of her mishap, much to her chagrin.

Charles Williams purchased acreage from Ben Lawrence in 1928 south of the Brown ranch on the west side of the highway and built the Shell Service Station which was later managed by Raper. He also purchased the Pedro farm. This land is now largely subdivided into residential lots and is listed on county maps as the Charles Williams subdivision. It is the largest area of residential development in the town. The service station remains and is in operation.

The business section of Olancha grew in a strip development along the highway, south from the Lacey Ranch. There were no paved streets beyond the highway on either side. Few roads were given names. The two original ranches still operated, and their close proximity to the businesses and highway assured the survival of the rural atmosphere of the town to travelers. Even today, the first sight of the town to greet travelers as they approach from the southern desert area is the expanse of greenery in the town, making it appear to truly be an oasis. Many farms and ranches in the area were long abandoned, and those which are operating now have been renewed or established in recent decades. Most had been left

untended, and were overgrown with sagebrush by the time later residents undertook the task of cultivating the land again. A few ranches of small acreage continued to produce hay crops, or were used as winter grazing land for small numbers of cattle, horses and sheep.

Although some residential buildings were erected to the northwest of the Lacey ranch, most of the residential area was south of the George Brown ranch, on the west side of the highway, commencing about a half mile south of the junction with Highway 190, and the southern end of the lake. This remains the area of most development.

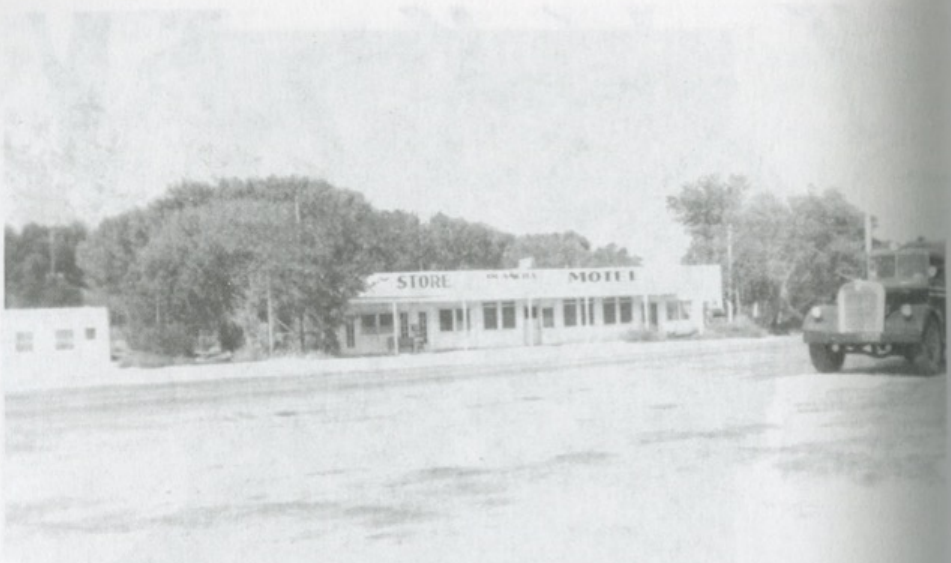


Barney Sears I. Cline Photo

Barney Sears residence, circa 1940s I. Carstensen photo

Olancha Cowboys: Back Row, from left: Pete Olivas, Leo Rogers, Jesse Covington, Charles Gilmore, Tommy Jefferson, Tom Lacey. Front row, from left, Irene Lubken, Hazel Warwick, Artie Lubken, Fred Reynolds, Fred Moore. I. Cline photo

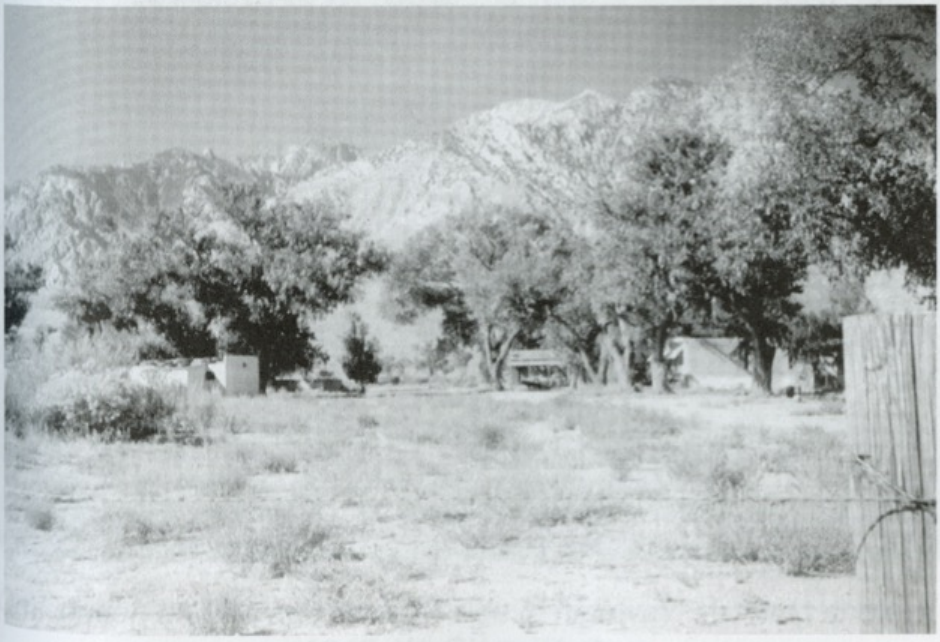
Calloway's Restaurant, ca 1940. I. Carstensen photo



Calloway (Adamson) store and motel, ca 1940.
A. Morgan Photo

Calloway's adobe motel presently. W. Olson photo

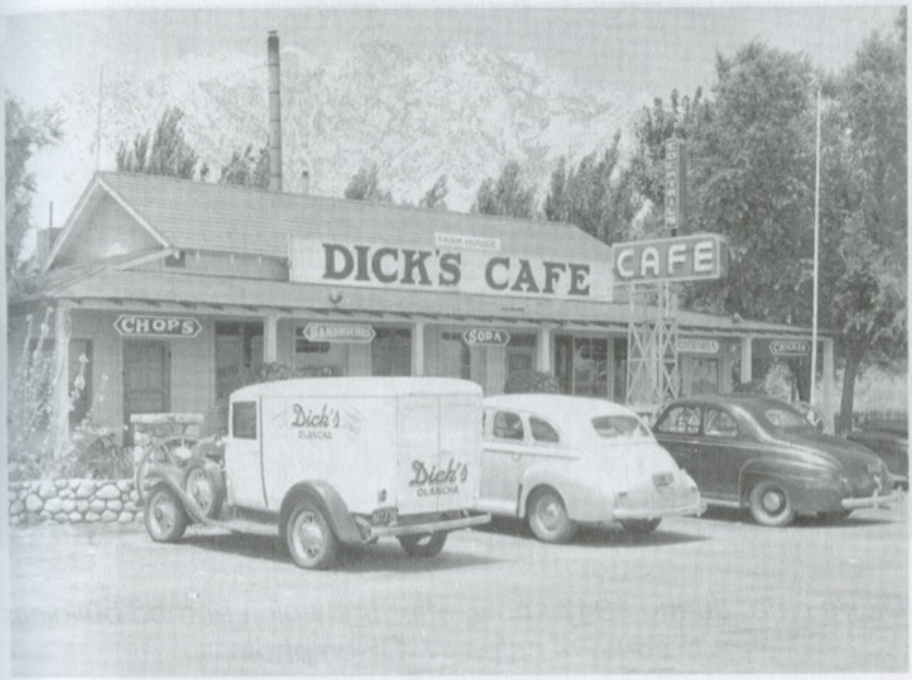
1931 photo of William and Mrs. Butler, Virginia Fitzhugh and mother, and Dr. Miller in front of residence at Butler motel. V. Lemon photo



Present ruins of Rancho Olancha motel, S. Elmer photo

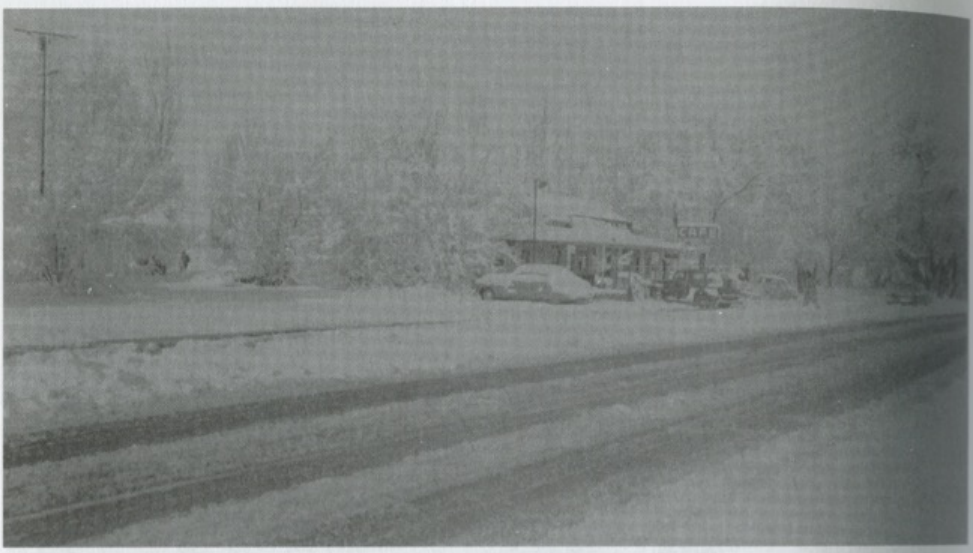
Barber's cafe, 1930s. I. Carstensen photo

Cafe, garage and Store/Post office, 1940s. A. Morgan photo



1940s photo of Dick's Cafe. W. Olson photo

Gas station and garage on east side of highway, showing snow of 1947. W. Olson photo



Dick's cafe, during 1947 snow, after fire which burned buildings south of cafe. W. Olson photo

Ranch House Cafe buildings presently. The old cottonwood at extreme right has a hole near the bottom where children hid treasures. W. Olson photo

Old gas station. W. Olson photo

Quonset store and service station. W. Olson photo

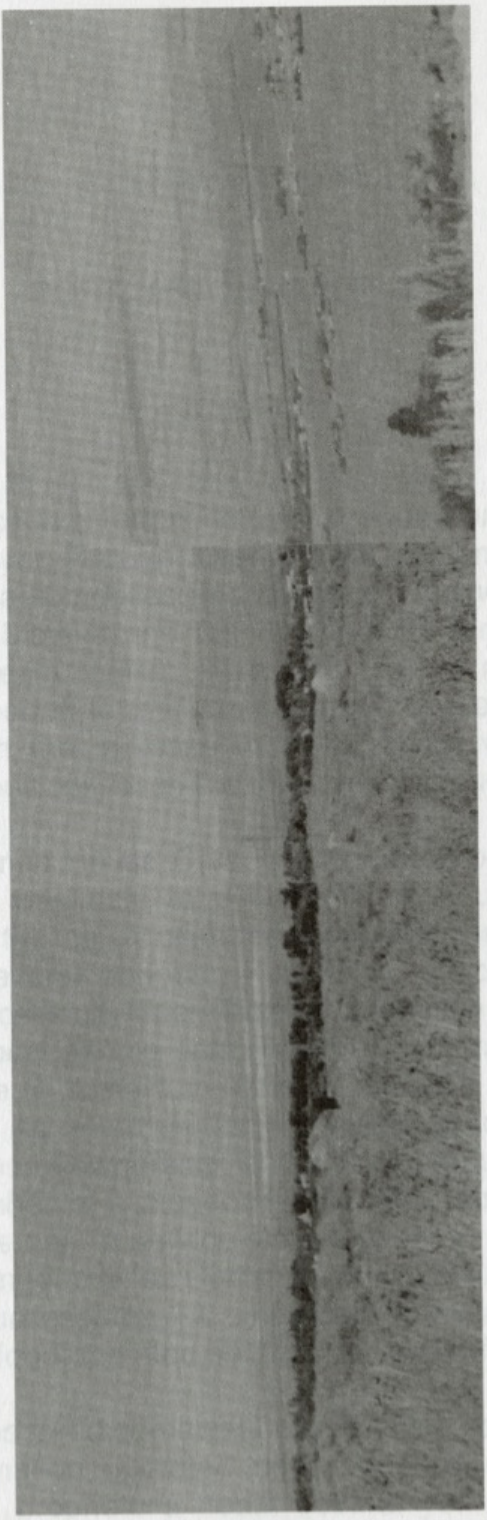
Old Castner service station. W. Olson photo

Service station at Castner location. W. Olson photo

Cantlay house. W. Olson photo

Service station south of town on Williams property. W. Olson photo

Entering Olancha from the south, circa 1938. A. Brown photo.



Views of present townsite and residential area. W. Olson photo

CHAPTER NINE

POST 1950 DEVELOPMENT

Business

The decade after World War II ended brought increased automobile travel through Olancha as citizens were able to purchase both automobiles and gasoline. Olancha was the mid point between Mojave and Bishop, and the turning off junction eastward to Death Valley. It was a natural resting place for tourists who needed to refill the gas tank for the balance of their journeys. With the increase in travel, there was an effort to establish new businesses in the town, mostly tourist oriented.

The Ranch House Cafe was operated by the Hiters until 1951, when it was sold to a family from southern California. Subsequently, the cafe changed ownership several times and experienced several periods of inactivity, although the present owner has successfully operated the cafe since the early 1980s. Although the local people patronize the restaurants, there is not enough volume to sustain multiple businesses during the slack, winter season. As noted earlier, the Adamson cafe experienced several changes of ownership, and was not rebuilt after it burned down. A member of a pioneer family from the Lone Pine area operated a cafe near a service station south of Fall Road, in the 1950s. It no longer exists. Currently, only the Ranch House Cafe is operating successfully. A small cafe featuring both Mexican and American food operated south of the postoffice until recently.

Garages fared somewhat better. One service station and garage combination operated under one owner-operator from 1940 until the proprietor's death several years ago. His wife supplemented their income by teaching school in both Olancha and Cartago. Another garage owner had operated continuously

since he moved to Olancha in the early 1940s until his death in the 1980s. Their children have moved from the area, but one owns property in the residential section of the town.

A small grocery store was managed by a succession of people at the location west of Adamson's Cafe at the south end of town until the early 1950s. A barber shop and beauty shop operated briefly in the same decade adjacent to the grocery store at the south end of town. Lack of sufficient local volume of business contributed to the demise of these enterprises. A large Quonset hut was moved onto the Lacey property east of the store which burned down in 1946, and housed first a garage and then a grocery store. It has remained open most of the time.

Kaiser Permanente Company built a mill to recover soda ash from Owens Lake on the west edge of the lake several miles north of Cartago in 1946. The construction of the plant and a railroad spur afforded employment for a number of residents, and subsequently several found employment at the plant when it commenced operation. The plant was dismantled in less than ten years, the railroad spur removed, and presently all that remains of the three-story plant are a few cement blocks and an access road from the highway.

The movie industry filmed several movies in the area, mostly in the sand dunes east of Olancha. The main body of the group headquartered in Lone Pine, where more films were made, so that economically the industry did not impact the area except for daily work by wranglers, and some increase in restaurant business. Several Hopalong Cassidy films were made here, along with other movies including "King of the Kyber Rifles".

In 1946, Bob and Betty Snyder from Los Angeles leased land from Lacey on the east side of the highway opposite the Ranch House Cafe, and built a motel and house. Complete with neon sign, the Starlight Motel opened for business in 1946 and closed for good in 1947. The cabins were used by Lacey to house ranch employees for a number of years until the buildings were razed because they had become a health and safety hazard. The house was tenanted by a succession of renters during the same period. The planned swimming pool never progressed beyond a bulldozed pit in the center of the complex. Today, the area is

pastureland.

About 1947, John Grant, a Los Angeles industrialist who owned property just south of the Oaks Road, built a service station, motel, cafe and an airstrip on his property and attempted to establish a townsite. He succeeded in having recognition given to the town on state highway maps and a highway sign was erected, but his application for the establishment of a post office was denied. The Cal Trans maintenance station for Olancha is located just south of this property. The development of this "town" within what was earlier considered Olancha boundaries probably prompted the residents to indicate the north end of this property to be the south boundary of Olancha initially. The highway signs are no longer posted. The dirt airfield strip is still cleared, but few planes utilize it. The motel is operated by new owners, who also own the Rustic Motel a few miles south. This motel was built on the Carstensen property. The cafe and service station at Grant are vacant and deteriorating.

Grant also owned property in Monache meadows, where he had a cabin, and a dirt airstrip. This was the landing field used by the aviators flying sportsmen into the mountains.

Mining interests in the area offer sporadic work for miners, truckers and mill workers. Modest mining operations by individuals has continued. A clay mill was erected adjacent to the railroad, to process the raw material. It has seen several periods of inactivity, but is currently processing clay which is now trucked out of the valley, since the closure of the railroad. A railroad platform stands south of the original, next to the clay mill. Today, since there is no train service, the platform is used as a loading dock for trucks which haul the clay products from the mill when it is operating.

In 1964, the post office became third class, and in 1970, was moved to a cinder block building south of the Adamson property on the east side of the highway. This building, constructed specifically for the post office, is the first post office building which has not shared either living quarters or a business.

Businesses remain tourist oriented. The small grocery store, while it provides necessities to the residents, cannot

compete with the volume buying power of the communities of Lone Pine, Bishop and Ridgecrest. The residents not only feel they save considerably by driving to these towns, or larger cities farther away, but have a larger selection of goods and brands. The store stocks not only staple groceries, but items generally found in tourist and camping oriented stores.

About two years ago, Haiwee Reservoir was opened to fishing, and an RV park has been established near the north end of the reservoir. Earlier, residents sometimes did fish at the reservoir under cover of darkness, and without permission. Those apprehended by the power plant employees were advised of the prohibition and asked to leave, sometimes with a wink as the boat sped away.

No industries are presently operating in the town, except for ranching and tourist oriented businesses. Currently there are three service stations, one garage, one cafe and a motel operating within the boundaries of the area. In the early 1990s, a large company built a bottling plant for spring water on land just north of the town boundaries, but employment of residents has not impacted the area to a great extent, according to some residents.

In 1986, the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power purchased three ranches in the Olancha area, the Lacey (Agustus Walker), Spencer (William Walker) and Thornburgh (Art Lubken) properties. The latter is north of the Olancha area, adjacent to the town of Cartago. The transaction includes water rights to Olancha Creek and comprises the bulk of the land in and around the Olancha townsite. Thus, in little over a century, the original land holdings and water rights have passed from private to corporate ownership. None of the original homesteads remain in the hands of descendants of those pioneers. Roy Hunter still owns a small acreage west of the Lacey Ranch which his father purchased in the twenties, but his major holdings are on his present ranch, which he and his wife purchased in 1959, and in Saline Valley. All three ranches continue in operation through a land-lease agreement with the City of Los Angeles.

Residential Patterns

In the past two decades, the availability of land at reasonable rates has attracted some residents, most of whom live in Olancha but commute to other communities to their work. There is presently a large percentage of absentee land-owners, some of whom lease out the land for small-scale ranching or farming, and others who use the property as a vacation home or tax write-off. Some residents have been those who have established or managed existing businesses. Some are successful, and remain. Others strive, and, unable to survive economically, move on.

Residents are employed on ranches, in mines and, on a small scale, by the local businesses. Public utilities account for some employment, including the City of Los Angeles maintenance crews, Cal Trans and Inyo County Road Department. Some work in other towns and commute daily. There are four ranches operating within the boundaries. Ranchers winter their stock on the salt marshes near the lake and supplement the feed with hay which they grow in irrigated fields. In the summer, the cattle are moved to the mountain meadows of the Sierra to the west and grazed on government property administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. Olancha is the gathering place for the start of the annual spring cattle drive to the Monache Meadows via the Oaks and Sage Flats trails southwest of Olancha. In the fall, the cattle are brought out of the mountains and held at Olancha for the separation of the herds and eventual trucking to home ranches or market. Some ranchers now truck the cattle to the trail head at Sawmill out of Lone Pine to spare them the steep ascension into the mountain meadows.

Housing in the town prior to the 1960s was modest. Aside from the ranches, few had built homes, utilizing a section of business buildings, former tourist cabins, motels, or mobile homes. Although most of the homes were constructed of lumber or stucco, some were built of cinder brick, which is mined from an ancient, extinct volcano near Little Lake about twenty five miles south of Olancha. One homesteader of 1912 built a stone house; another built one of adobe bricks. Both remain inhabited. The houses which are built on the Charles Williams subdivision are of

many styles and different materials. The lots in this area range from one-fourth acre to more than one acre, with earlier residences interspersed among the newer homes. The majority of the houses are of pumice brick or stucco construction, mostly one-story. Mobile homes are situated on some lots.

Because of the restriction of readily available and ample water, lawns of grass are not in abundance. Many have landscaping of drought resistant shrubs and flowers. The soda ash which blows from the Owens Lake is detrimental to many shrubs and flowers. Homeowners grow small vegetable gardens, and some keep chickens. Many of the homes have hedges of tamarisk for windbreaks.

There are less than two hundred registered voters in the consolidated district of Olancha. There are approximately two to three hundred residents, the population fluctuating according to economic conditions and job opportunities. Tourist trade in the summer months brings an influx of business for the service stations, garages, restaurants and motels. Some of the businesses are seasonal, closing down or changing management during the winter or "slow" months. Another detriment to new businesses is the fact that many of the buildings are on leased property, and there is a reluctance to invest heavily on rented land.

As with many rural communities, the percentage of second and third generation residents is declining, with the young people moving to more urban areas upon attaining adulthood. They seek higher education, better and more employment opportunities, and the expanded services provided in urban communities. However, other people of all ages, seeking respite from the crowded urban areas, move into the area so that the age range remains fairly static. The number of residents over age 55 has risen, as with many other communities of like composition.

Community Services

The town is governed under the County General Plan, with representation by an elected supervisor. The district served by this supervisor includes a large area south and east of Olancha as

well as the town itself.

An elementary school serves kindergarten through sixth grade students, who are bused to school from the outlying rural areas. Buses transport older students to Lone Pine schools. Some of the students travel from Little Lake, twenty-five miles south of Olancha, and beyond. Olancha students who travel to Lone Pine face a daily bustrip of twenty-three miles each way. Local residents are very supportive of the Olancha school, with a strong parent-teacher organization. Financially, residents have supported the school through increased tax rates. Parents and other residents participate in programs and special events at the school. Aside from private residences and the restaurants, the school and fire station are the only other social gathering places.

There is no indication that a church was ever established in Olancha. Occasionally, a Sunday School class has been held in nearby Cartago. Lone Pine serves as the closest locale of churches of both Protestant and Catholic denominations.

Law enforcement in Olancha is presently served by the County Sheriff's Department from the substation in Lone Pine. Previously, a resident deputy sheriff served the area, an arrangement instituted several times in the last four decades. The majority of the residents questioned appreciated the resident deputy. Criminal activity is minimal, with most of the petty crimes attributed to non-residents or newcomers to the area. Transient residents of the area are more likely to be suspected of any wrongdoing by the long time residents, as is the case in many communities.

About fifteen years ago, a popular rancher who owned land north of the town boundaries, near Cartago, was murdered. The residents were convinced of the identity of the perpetrator, and were proven right when their suspect was convicted. He is presently serving his term in state prison. There have been no homicides in the town since, and had not been one before, in anyone's memory.

The nearest medical facilities are over twenty miles away in Lone Pine, as are all pharmaceutical, cosmetology, clothing and hardware establishments. There is no public transportation

system in Olancha. Other than private vehicles, the only other transportation is via Greyhound bus, which operates one bus daily in each direction on a regular route.

There is no central water system. Water for both domestic use and irrigation is derived from wells on each property. Electricity is provided by the City of Los Angeles Water and Power Department, with cost of the poles, wires and installation being borne by the user. Some of the residences use generators for power. Bottled gas is used for cooking and heating. Some also use wood burning stoves. Open dumping is no longer permitted, and trash and garbage is now hauled to the waste treatment plant in Lone Pine. The dump was formerly east of town and south of State Route 190 at the northwest end of the sand dunes. There is no sewer system for the community. Each business and residence provides sewage disposal via cesspools and septic tanks.

A Community Services District was formed in 1965. With the help of federal funds, a Community Services Fire Department was formed. It consists of three trucks and one rescue vehicle, and is manned by volunteers. Residents support the fire department by contributing to annual raffles and organizing an annual picnic and play day, which is well attended by residents and other valley citizens. The business communities in surrounding towns also contribute to these affairs. Community meetings are held in the fire station on Shop Street.

Store and service station east of Ranch House Cafe. W. Olson photo

Grant Motel shortly after opening, 1952. Los Angeles Examiner photo

Cal Trans station at southern boundary of town W. Olson photos

Fire station located in former Cal Trans employee residence. W. Olson photo

Fire station No. 2 located on Shop Street. W. Olson photo

CHAPTER TEN

NEARBY COMMUNITIES

Cartago

Originally known as Cartago Landing, Cartago was allegedly given its name by Southern Pacific Railroad when the line was extended through the valley in 1910. Although early maps show a nearby creek as Carthage, it is not known whether this prompted the name. Land filings in the recorder's office show that Cartago Creek was also known as Carthage Creek. The creek is now locally known and shown on maps as Cartago. Accounts of the freight stages and the Bessie Brady story refer to Cartago Landing. An old map of mining areas shows "Cartago Landing".

In the 1870s, Cartago Landing was a depot for the freight shipped across the lake from Cerro Gordo, with the ore stored in pallets awaiting freight wagons, to be shipped out of the valley to southern California. At one time, the pallets were stacked in rows as high as a man's head, it was said. After the railroad was established, the ore was shipped to the north end of the lake. A company, the Cartago Pacific Alkali, built a plant to recover soda ash and minerals from the lake, and built the houses in the town to accommodate the workers. It was a "company town" until the thirties, when the plant closed. Many of the original houses still stand, and are occupied.

A school was established in 1918, and existed until the district was consolidated with Olancha as the Olancha Union Elementary School District. Thereafter, the children were bused to Olancha School. Helen Cornell and Mrs. Neil Springer were teachers at Cartago in 1918-1920. A postoffice was established on March 1, 1918, with Max Sickman as the first postmaster. He

had earlier served in that capacity at Olancha. The post office was discontinued and consolidated with Olancha in the early 1980s. Sunday School classes and church services were held occasionally in the community building, usually with a minister from Lone Pine traveling to the town after services at the home church. A service station operated for many years, and a motel, but both are closed now. There are residences on both sides of the highway.

A major Native American village was located west of town in Cartago canyon, and consultants stated that the area south and west of the residential area was a large burial ground and ceremonial center. Archeological surveys in the last two decades have identified and preserved some of the area. A. W. Von Schmidt, on his initial survey of the area in 1856, remarked in his notes that there was a large Indian settlement at the mouth of the canyon to the west. The creek is noted, but not named.

Just south of the town proper, the Lubken ranch was located and operated for many years by Artie Lubken. These ranches were originally part of Agustus Walker's holdings, and purchased by the Lubkens from his estate. Art and his wife Irene sold the ranch to Bill Thornburgh in the early 1950s, but remained as advisors for a year. Thornburgh, a newcomer to ranching at the time of the purchase, became active in the community and ranching interests and was a well respected and popular resident at the time he was killed in the late 1970s. His murder was the first anyone could remember in Olancha. His wife's family moved to the ranch and the children have become long time residents of the area, engaged in ranching.

Part of the ranch holdings are now owned by Anheuser-Busch company. Adjacent on the south, the Cabin Bar Ranch was one of the ranches purchased by the City of Los Angeles, and is leased and operated by a Lone Pine rancher. A small house and adjacent cafe building front the highway here. The Cabin Bar Cafe operated as a small eating establishment for a number of years, but both buildings are slowly crumbling. The fading lettering on the building is still visible.

The Oaks

At the base of the mountains west of Olancha, at the mouth of Oak Canyon, Dick Burns purchased land in 1928, and built a house and corrals. Later he added two more houses. The entrance was marked by two large stone posts with a crossbeam of timber, with "The Oaks" burned and carved into it. He and Frances Gragg, a writer, operated the Oaks Pack Station in the thirties. The other two houses were at first used as vacation cottages by clients, and later, after the pack station ceased to operate, retired miners of the area lived in them. Otto Raske and Blackie Lynn, both miners, lived there for many years. Con Zuniga and his father were other residents, as well as Jim McKenna, who fashioned the stonework for the entrance.

There are several old Native American trails leading from this area to the mountain pass, called Olancha Pass. Cattle were moved into the mountain meadows via this pass and the one just south at Sage Flats. Sage Flats is used now, as it is a much easier route for the cattle. There are many black oak trees growing at the site, and the number of metates formerly at the site indicated a sizeable Native American population there, at least seasonally. Walker Creek, the diversion stream built by Agustus Walker in the 1860s, was literally lined with metates and pestles. One consultant stated that prior to 1920, there was a Native American village of about twenty families living just south of the Oaks. She thought that it was a Shoshoni village.

Fall Creek, which exited at the pack station, flowed down toward Haiwee, but at the time Walker diverted the creek to Olancha, it dried up. Remains of the stream bed can still be seen, however. The course of Oak Creek can be seen at places south of the road to the Oaks. This road from the highway was known as the Oaks Road, but is now called Walker Creek Road. It is gravel and rocky, and not maintained beyond the aqueduct and power line roads. People inhabit the remaining dwellings at times, although there are no modern conveniences.

Sage Flats

South of The Oaks and separated by a low range of hills, lies the community of Sage Flats, in a small valley tucked between spurs of the Sierra foothills. It is the terminus of the trail out of the Monache meadows area, and believed by many to be the trail which Farley followed to the valley. There is reference to Walden's Meadows in early writings, but it has not been established that this is what is now called Sage Flats. Walden was a partner in Farley's enterprise.

There is a stream and springs in the meadows, with oak and willows predominating. About two dozen families live in the area or scattered down the hillside toward the highway. The road into the area is located on the west side of the highway about four miles south of Olancha. Most of the residents have an Olancha mailing address.

There are numerous artifacts, metates and rock art, both pictograph and petroglyphs in the area, attesting to a sizeable and possibly permanent settlement there by Native Americans. Although it has not been established, there is some speculation that the inhabitants might have been from the western area of the Sierra, since the rock art is unlike that of other Owens Valley sites. One grinding stone is about twelve feet diameter, and has numerous pits, indicating that it was a communal area. Much of the area has been surveyed and documented, and since it is on private property with restricted access, has been largely preserved. In the hills behind the populated areas are remains of arrestas and mining equipment, presumably used by Mexican miners prior to annexation of the area from Mexico by the United States. This area, also, is on private property and inaccessible to the public.

Early settlers established small ranches and orchards in the area. Names appearing are those of Clarence Towler, Walters, and Glascock. One consultant said that Glascock owned a coffee company in Southern California. A later resident was the manufacturer of one of the first cake mixes. Some of the residents use their homes as a summer, or vacation, place, others live there year round. Artists and writers have occupied residences there for varying periods, but were not considered

permanent residents.

Clarence Towler established a peach orchard there prior to 1920, but the trees froze one winter, and he moved to a farm east of the highway in Olancha. His wife remarked that the days were pleasant, but the nights were cool in the summer. The area is about 5000 feet elevation, and is subject to sub-freezing temperatures in winter months.

The Silverleaf Ranch in the meadows is home to long time residents, Jim and Pauline Grobien. An attorney from Los Angeles owned what is now called Longcroft Ranch. Lilas and Crim Clayman, nightclub owners from Berkeley, built a vacation home near Sage Flats and spent many months at a time there. John and Claire Storm purchased their land from Con Zuniga and his father in 1930, and built their house on the edge of the San Andreas fault, thinking it was an old stream bed.

John worked for the State Highway Department, and helped to pave the first stretch of highway in the valley, at Cowan's grade. He later worked for many years for the Inyo County Road Department. He and his wife were entertaining story tellers, and recounted many experiences with their choice of home.

One incident they related happened when they, their daughter and son-in-law decided to go up into the canyon for a picnic. John drove, and Stormy and their daughter lay in the back of the pickup. At road's end, John stopped under a spreading oak tree and called back to inquire if this place was all right. "Drive on! Drive on!" the ladies shouted. "I can't go any farther," John replied. "Then back up! Back up! Quick!" Stormy yelled. "There's a mountain lion lying on the limb right above us, and he's looking at us!" Grinding gears and screeching tires as John put the truck in reverse frightened the lion, and he jumped over the pickup and loped away. After that, Stormy remarked dryly, John always looked up into the trees before he parked in the shade.

Claire, or Stormy, as she was called, drove the schoolbus in 1930, and discovered the property when she drove Con Zuniga and his sister home from school. She told her husband she had found her home, and persuaded him to buy it. After they

purchased the land, John used the blade of his caterpillar to break into a huge boulder, seeking the source of water seeping out. As he told it, with some relish, on the first try, he hit the spring "smack-dab dead center", and fashioned a gravity flow water system for their house. His spring still bubbles at the site of his first "strike". Of the proximity of their house to the earthquake fault, Stormy remarked that they had an early-warning system, since they could hear the sound of rocks falling just long enough before the ground movement to allow them time to get out of the house. However, no earthquake has caused damage to it. Their patio is but a scant ten feet from the rift, and it is from there that John fed a huge covey of quail. They would come and perch on the patio when he called them to feed.

During his years working for the County Road Department, John had to realign the Darwin Cutoff, or Highway 190, several times, because of the proximity to the southern end of the lake. The roadbed would become softened if the water level rose, and the marshy ground would slowly sink the road. One time, John said he got too far off the roadbed and the grader became stuck. He reported to the office in Independence that he could not get the grader out, and that it was "sinking fast". Probably thinking John was exaggerating, the rescue crew was not prompt enough in responding, and next day, the grader was completely buried. He said as far as he knew, it was still there!

The Storm property is the easternmost property of the Sage Flats area. Most of the other residences are hidden behind the low range of hills. At the junction of Sage Flats Road and the highway, a small service station/cafe/cabin enterprise operated in conjunction with a pack station in the 1930s and 1940s. Called Snow Pack, it has since been razed, and no trace of it remains. Several pack outfits operated out of Sage Flats into the Monache Meadows area of the Sierra.

Haiwee

The name Haiwee is derived from the Paiute word for dove, Hai-wai, and was given to the area about ten miles south of Olancha and east of the highway. There were several springs in the area, and many doves or pigeons congregated nearby. Native Americans regularly trapped the doves for food. A stage

depot was located here, managed by the MacGuires. It was the first stop south of Olancha. The trail at that time went from Olancha, southeasterly to Haiwee, thence south and west to the next stop at Cowan's grade, later Dunmovin.

When the aqueduct was built, a power plant was built at Haiwee, and a reservoir constructed. It is the largest water basin in the aqueduct system. Trees lining the edge of the water and the expanse of blue water are in stark contrast to the tan and white hills of the Coso range just to the east. Roads lead from the north end of the reservoir into the Cosos, where talc and other minerals are mined, and farther, where some ranchers wintered their cattle at Cactus Flat, Centennial and Junction Ranch. Most of this area has since been taken over by the China Lake Naval Ordnance Station and travel in the area is restricted. There are a few mines just east of the reservoir, recovering talc, clay and other minerals.

The reservoir had been closed to all fishing or recreation until the early 1990s, when it was opened to limited fishing. RV parking and rest areas are maintained at both north and south Haiwee. A privately owned RV campground is located west of the highway near the north Haiwee road, the only development resulting from a promotional land sale in the 1950s. At that time, a southern California entrepreneur purchased land on the west side of the highway overlooking Haiwee, and sold small parcels as lakeside vacation land. The lakeside was visible, of course, but only after purchasing the lot did many find that their resort homesite might overlook the reservoir, or "lake", but it was inaccessible to them. Most of the lots lie idle.

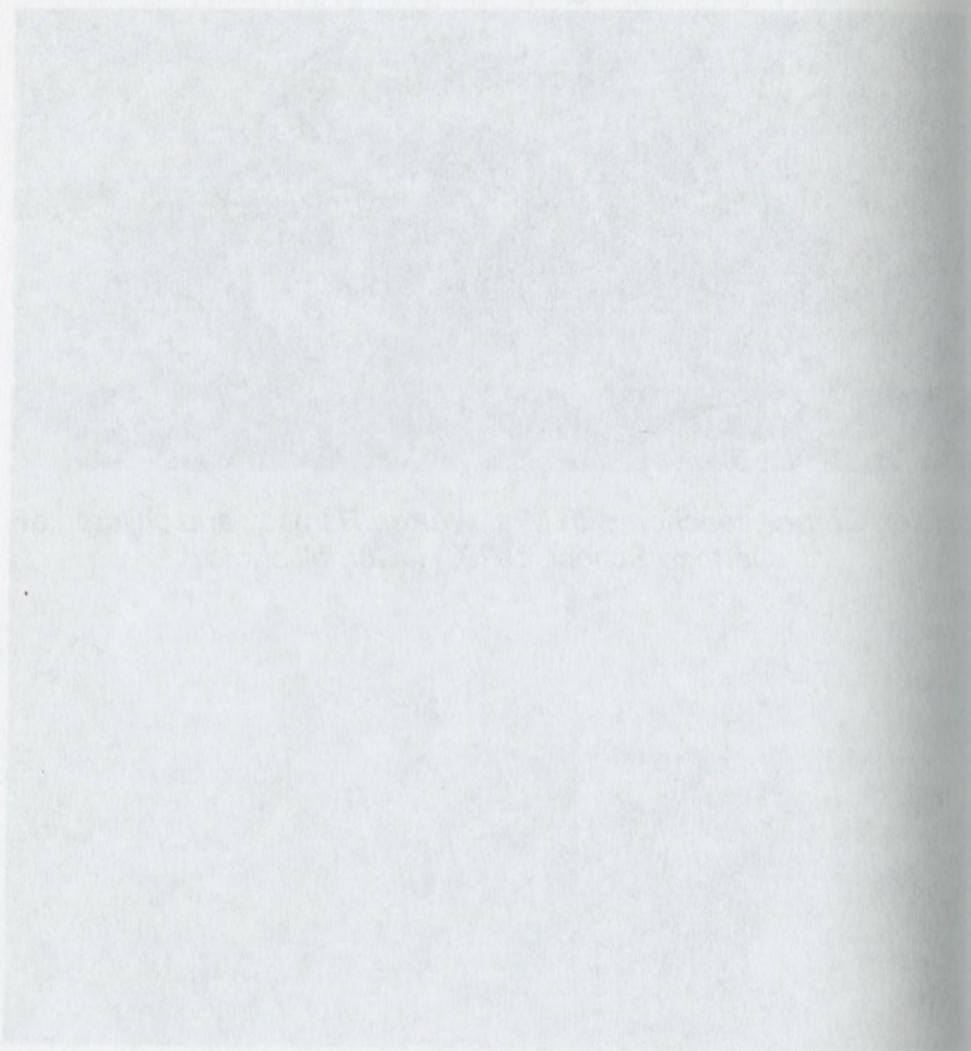
East of Haiwee in a box canyon are remains of an old mining mill, long abandoned. It was said to be at the site of a "salted" gold mine, engineered by persons from the San Joaquin Valley. Much advertising of this "new discovery" was made, and souvenirs were passed out to prospective stockholders. The venture was short-lived, and the machinery was left to rust. Roads into the canyon area were inundated by the waters of the reservoir. A road exists at the north end of the lake to afford entrance to some mines, and further east, the winter livestock ranges in Cactus Flats and Centennial.

Several families live at the power plant at the south end of the reservoir. They are employees of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The children attend the Olancha school, and the Lone Pine high school.

These areas are the closest to the Olancha site, and most residents use an Olancha mailing address. They have not been covered in depth, but mentioned as reference points to many earlier residents and events, and to present a view of the surrounding communities.

Highway sign at entrance to Haiwee Power Plant. S. Elmer photo

Helen Cornell, teacher, with Mrs. Warren Ramsey and children at Cartago School, 1918. H. Cornell photo



AFTERWORD

No history is completely inclusive nor conclusive. The vagaries of time and memory, revisions and interpretations alter the perceptions, and at times conflict with contemporary versions. This narrative has attempted to trace the history of this community from its beginning in 1861 to the present era. As much as possible, the oral histories were substantiated by archival evidence to preserve the integrity of the events described. However, it was not possible to verify some events. But because these occurrences, taken as a whole, contribute to the fabric of the community and its inhabitants, they were included.

Not all original homesteads have been identified nor specifically located, and some long time residents have no doubt been overlooked. No attempt was made to include every resident, but rather those who established businesses which endured, buildings which remain and may be still used as reference points, and some of those hardy souls still remembered, who came early and lingered long. If this volume has helped long time residents to preserve their memories and document their roots, or contributed to the understanding of some of the places, names and reference marks, as well as give present residents a sense of their land's beginning, then it has achieved its purpose. The reader's enjoyment would be an added bonus.

Contemporary businesses and populations have not been dealt with in depth, not because of their unimportance, but rather because they are a part of the present, and belong to future historical accounts. Some of the residences which lie outside the boundaries set forth in the beginning of this work are still considered by many to be a part of Olancha, but are not included to a great extent. Sage Flats, The Oaks, Haiwee, Cartago, and other communities lie within the loose area, but are not within the boundaries of the town, and this has been an attempt to relate the survival of one small, concentrated area of population.

Continuous residency, industry and business enterprises

have kept the townsite alive when towns which at first boasted much larger populations, have all but vanished. The location remains on the only highway through the valley, at the junction of the highway to Death Valley National Monument, affording transport of goods, services and the touring public. This location has played an important part in the town's survival. Housing, population mobility, and available land have contributed to the pattern of small housing lots in a concentrated area of the town, with the farms outlying, and the business area in a strip along the highway.

That any community this small, spawned during the mining exploitation, has survived for well over a hundred years, in an area of ghost town proliferation, is remarkable. Whether it will continue to survive with the anchoring properties now in corporate hands is yet to be seen. It has survived for one hundred and thirty years, with at least some business or trade operation in addition to the residential area. The expanded residential construction indicates that this little town will continue to be a viable community into the future.

One last thing: The excerpts scattered here and there are from a tongue-in-cheek, two page paper called The Olancha Journal, published about 1940, boasting "Published Daily-Now and Then". It was the first, and as far as can be determined, last issue.

Disclaimer

The purpose of this publication is to narrate the history of the town and to entertain. Every effort has been made to make this work as complete and accurate as possible. However, there may be mistakes both typographical and in content. Therefore, this book should be used only as a general source and not the ultimate guide to the history of the town. The author shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly, by information contained in this book. If you do not wish to be bound by the above, you may return this book to the author for a full refund.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wilma Olson lived in Olancha and the Owens Valley for almost two decades, from the 1940's to the 1960's. She was prompted to write the story of Olancha after a news article described a razed landmark as a building "nobody remembered and nobody cared". She remembered, and soon found that others shared her thoughts.

"Their reponse was overwhelming," she says. "Over and over, I heard the words, 'It (the story) needs to be told.' The residents graciously shared their pictures, stories, memories and homes as this work progressed."

Olson holds a degree in anthropology from California State University, Sacramento, and was a local reporter for Chalfant Press during her residency in Olancha. She later authored several parent education manuals during her years with Sacramento City Unified School District. She is retired and resides in Sacramento.

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